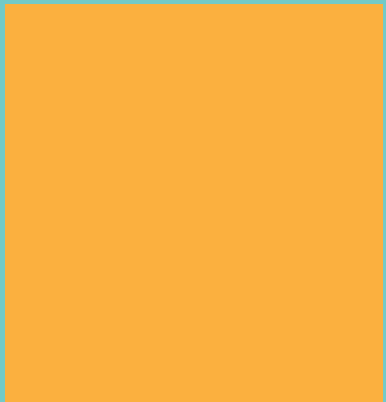


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Linguistic Approaches to Literature

30

The Pragmatics of Irony and Banter

Edited by
Manuel Jobert and Sandrine Sorlin



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The Pragmatics of Irony and Banter

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Volume 30

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PART I

Theoretical and empirical revisiting of irony (and banter)

Introduction

The intricacies of irony and banter

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This introductory chapter starts with a brief presentation of what triggered our interest in the joint study of irony and banter. We then delve into the theoretical intricacies of these two discursive practices. We review the major theoretical frameworks that have contributed to our understanding of these practices and pinpoint some crucial issues. We conclude with an overview of the different viewpoints expressed and adopted in the following chapters.

1. Origins and objectives

Call it ironic or not, the study of irony has inspired an impressive number of articles and books. Yet theoreticians are still fighting over where to place its defining borders. With each new paper or book come novel theoretical nuances accounting for various aspects of what turns out to be a multi-faceted phenomenon. At first sight, the present book is no exception to the rule: some of its chapters offer new theoretical models or (re)exploit existing frameworks, others tend to combine supposedly incompatible theories into a workable inclusive model, all of them converging to offer new avenues into this unbelievably slippery notion. But the main objective of this book is not so much to define what irony *is* as to understand what it *does* from a pragmatic perspective: what are its social and pragmatic functions? Why would one speak/write ironically rather than straightforwardly? What added value does the ironical statement have over the literal one? Much has been said and done on how irony is processed – with a debate still going on about whether an ironical statement is processed right away (Gibbs 1994, 2002) or indirectly (Giora 1997, 2003, 2011; Giora et al. 2007) – but much less has been done on the social reasons why people use irony (see Dews et al. 2007; Colston 2007). The pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic approach adopted here – that is pragmatics considered in its interface with both linguistics and society or culture – intends to highlight the manifold functions of the phenomenon in a wide of

array of oral and written genres (TV shows, sketches, promotional videos, drama and novels from the 17th century to the 19th century).

The second objective that may differentiate this book from others is that it turns the spotlight on another discursive practice (banter) that is often blended into the more general category of humour studies (Dynel 2011). To our knowledge no book-length academic work has yet been devoted to banter alone or in conjunction with irony, which is what concerns us here. The initial impetus behind this book was to pay a tribute to Geoffrey Leech who passed away in 2014, a few weeks after the publication of *The Pragmatics of Politeness* (2014), by giving pride of place to his theoretical model that was among the first to bring irony and banter under the same theoretical banner. His framework of politeness indeed brings together irony and banter in a specific and unique way that this book intends to discuss. However, it soon became apparent that while some authors considered it an asset to compare the two notions, others deliberately chose to keep them well apart. These theoretical choices, in themselves, shed light on the way researchers consider irony and banter depending on their theoretical backgrounds.

2. What is an ironical utterance?

2.1 Beyond the classical trope

Why is irony such an intricate phenomenon? Ask anyone on the street and they might tell you that being ironic is saying the opposite of what you think. What you say is not what you mean. In fact, you imply the contrary: it is an entirely pragmatic phenomenon depending on the context for its uptake. This corresponds to the classical definition of the trope which, from Aristotle to modern treaties of rhetoric, has been maintained almost invariable (Fontanier 1830; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1954; Muecke 1970; Booth 1974; Le Guern 1975). A quick example taken from a scene of the opening of Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015) will show why the classical definition of irony can be said to have some validity. In the dead of a Wyoming winter blizzard walks a bounty hunter, named Major Marquis Warren, who has lost his horse. He approaches the stage-coach of another very famous bounty hunter, John Ruth, who is handcuffed to one of his outlaws (as he is known to bring them in alive to hang) in case someone else dares to claim the substantial reward promised for bringing in the criminal (dead or alive). He won't accept to take the first bounty hunter on his coach before taking many precautionary steps like having Major Marquis Warren leave his two guns at a safe distance and have him put his hands "way above his hat" for instance. This brings the latter to comment, addressing the driver (O. B. Jackson):

(1) Real trustin' fella, huh?

The audience understand that he implies the opposite (Ruth being a real trusting fellow is “overtly untruthful” [Dynel 2013]), making a comment on the bounty hunter’s attitude through the coach driver. Jackson’s ensuing answer to (1): “not so much” gets us out of the humorous frame Warren has tried to create (for the sake of the audience), implying that he had better comply with John Ruth’s demands, the negative understatement (“not so much”) reinforcing the degree of the bounty hunter’s distrust.

In fact, rather than the simple negation of its propositional content (he is a trusting fellow / he is not a trusting fellow), what Marquis Warren’s ironical comment implicitly calls for is a reversal of the *evaluation* that is made of the bounty hunter. Basing his analysis on Seto’s (1998) conception of polarity reversal, Partington (2007) indeed demonstrates that irony has to do with a proportionate reversal of evaluative meaning, which is obvious in cases of hyperbolic ironical utterances (as when a child spills the jam jar over a brand new carpet and the mother exclaims: “Just splendid”) or litotic ironies (imagine someone referring to another person who is besides himself with rage saying: “the fellow is a bit angry, isn’t he?”). What the ironical utterances invite the interpreter to do is not to negate the propositional meaning (“it is not splendid” or “the fellow is not a little bit angry”) but to reverse the apparent (good or understated) evaluation. In the second instance (“the fellow is a bit angry, isn’t he?”), the pragmatic function of irony may be to offer some comic relief as in Tarantino’s film where the character projects himself as “humorous” and “dramatic”, thereby, to use Partington’s words, winning “[the] audience’s alignment and affiliation” (1566).

2.2 Subcategories

A subcategory of the evaluation reversal theory contains the cases of irony as “echoic mention” or “echoic interpretation” put forward by Sperber and Wilson in their relevance theory perspective (1981, 1992). The duality implied in echoic irony (where at least two “voices” can be heard) is also at the centre of French argumentation theories (Ducrot 1980, 2010; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980) that posit the existence of two possible argumentative paths in any ironical utterance thus marked by inherent ambiguity. The “polyphony” that seems to characterise this practice can be sensed in the following examples, drawn (and translated) from Van Overbeke (2004:104–5). They are evaluations of the same discursive event, that of a worried or very annoyed woman commenting on her husband coming home quite late:

- (2) You're home too late!¹
- (3) For someone who said he'd come back early, well-done!²
- (4) Heavy traffic again then?³
- (5) The early bird gets the worm⁴

Example (2) does not instruct the husband to reverse the evaluation: there is no ambiguity possible as to what the woman thinks. She gives vent to her feelings most directly and literally without any use of an ironical trope. The others echo some other 'voice' than the speaker's: instance (3) underlines the contrast between the husband's intention (or promise) that is here indirectly 'mentioned' and the late arrival. (4) can be perceived as an excuse that may have been used previously. Echoing the excuse, the woman ends up presenting it as inexcusable. As Van Overbeke (2004:105, our translation) puts it: "the argumentative ambiguity resides here on the one hand in the suggestion of a plausible excuse that could tip the scale in favour of indulgence ("Heavy traffic again then?"), or on the other hand in the suggestion of a false apology that is meant to reinforce the condemnation of the husband's lateness". Lastly, the quotation effect could not be clearer in (5) that makes use of an impersonal saying from which the husband is supposed to draw the required inference: "Being a late bird, I won't get the worm".

The echoic interpretation of irony indeed seems to fit accounts of its use in literary pieces that tend to inextricably mix voices (the narrator's and the character's for instance), as Black (2006) underlines, nevertheless qualifying Sperber and Wilson's expression of "disapproval" (1992): whilst the two authors assert that irony expresses some kind of disapproving / mocking / ridiculing of the opinion that is echoed, Black claims that the dissociation from the opinion echoed can be one of mere "detachment" (Black 2006: 113). But concentrating on voices can lead us astray in literature or any written genres where voices are less easily decipherable than "points of view". Morini (2010, 2016) defines what he calls "perspectival irony" as consisting in distancing oneself from a point of view that one seems to be assuming: "the speaker voices the point of view but distances herself from it in a spirit of perspectival disengagement" (2016: 562). Whether a voice is echoed or a point of view apparently assumed, it is nonetheless important (in literature especially) to identify the different actants (the ironist, her victim[s], her witness[es]) in the interactive event and their reasons for using irony. What is the main goal/target of the ironical statement? Who is it meant to share knowledge

-
1. "Tu rentres trop tard !".
 2. "Pour quelqu'un qui devait rentrer tôt, c'est réussi !".
 3. "Encore des embouteillages, sans doute ?".
 4. "L'avenir appartient à qui se couche tôt !".

with and at the expense of whom? What roles do ironical utterances tend to distribute? “Place-work” indeed seems a key element for interpretation.

3. Competing theories

Sperber and Wilson’s theory nevertheless fails to account for all ironic examples as the notion of “echoic mention/interpretation” cannot do justice to the wide range of possible cases. For Partington (2007:1567), “to reduce *all* irony to mere mocking echo is to turn one’s back on the richness, the power, the elegance, the variety and the sheer creativity that the use of this figure entails. Irony does not echo, but evokes and invents”.

If one takes a look at the competing theories of irony, one can see repeated attempts at finding the necessary and sufficient conditions for an utterance to count as ironic. For Clark and Gerrig’s 1984 “pretense theory”, what is crucial is not “the presence of an utterance to be echoed” (125) but the fact that an author “pretends” to perform certain speech acts, just as Jonathan Swift pretends to “speak as a member of the English ruling class to an English audience” in *A Modest Proposal* (123). The superiority of their theory, they claim, also lies in the fact that it is broad enough to encompass dramatic and situational irony. Conversely, Wilson (2006:20) maintains that pretence theory cannot be perceived as an alternative to the echoic account for it lacks what can only be supplemented by the notion of echoic use: “what is missing from non-echoic versions of the pretence account is precisely what is emphasized by the echoic account: that the attitude expressed in irony is primarily a thought or utterance that the speaker *attributes* to some identifiable person or type of person, or to people in general”. More recently, Wilson (2013) extracted three key features: a dissociative attitude, a normative bias to which must be added a specific ironical “tone”.

For Kumon-Nakamura et al. (2007:87), the notion of “allusion” is more satisfactory for it is more general and inclusive: “the mechanism of allusion replaces the narrower mechanisms of echoic mention (Sperber & Wilson 1981), echoic interpretation (Sperber & Wilson 1986) and echoic reminder (Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989), because they are, by definition, special cases of allusion”. In a revised (neo-)Gricean approach, Attardo (2000a) sees “mentioning” as unnecessary and proposes the notion of “inappropriateness” as “a necessary and sufficient cause of irony in an utterance” (806). This requires Attardo to expand Grice’s Cooperative Principle composed of four maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner) with a fifth maxim: “be appropriate”. Ironic utterances that feature inappropriateness and thereby violate Grice’s Cooperative Principle will thus be understood in an implicature. The added maxim must be distinguished from the

Maxim of Relation/Relevance for an utterance can be contextually *inappropriate* and at the very same time *relevant* to the context: “irony is essentially an inappropriate utterance which is nevertheless relevant to the context” (822). Dynel (2014:622) also adopts a neo-Gricean approach, setting two conditions as the “acid test”: overt untruthfulness (the flouting of Grice’s Maxim of Quality is explicit but can sometimes only be implied) and implied negative evaluation.

These different sets of (necessary and/or sufficient) conditions or added maxims seem to be not so much competing as complementing each other however. For there appears to be qualitatively distinct forms of irony, calling for qualitatively distinct theories. As Colston (2007: 130) puts it:

- (6) It might thus simply be the case that verbal irony involves a family of mechanisms, each of which might have a slightly different set of necessary conditions for success, that overlap on many instances but which leave some gaps – hence the proliferation of accounts and the difficulty of shifting them down into one.

Reviewing a wide range of contemporary theories (irony as implicit display [Utsumi 2000], as indirect negation [Giora 1995, 2003; Giora & Fein 1999; Peleg et al. 2008], as bisociation [Barbe 1993, 1995], as bicoherence [Shelley 2001] as well as those mentioned above like Sperber and Wilson’s echoic type, irony as relevant inappropriateness [Attardo 2000a, 2000b], as reversal of evaluation [Partington 2007] or as pretence [Clark & Gerrig 1984], Simpson (2011:39) ventures a unifying definition, in an attempt to bring the various insights of these theories into one workable analytic framework: he proposes a definition that places some sort of “paradox” at the heart of any ironical statement. Breaking down this broad term into two sub-definitions, he highlights the idea of a (conceptual) “gap” or “mismatch” between what is said and what is meant on the one hand or between what is known and a discursive context on the other. It could be that the mesh of this theoretical net is not quite tight enough to retain the slippery eel that is irony but it offers a welcome “synergy” between various models that makes it possible to avoid showcasing one to the detriment of another. This extended definition also accommodates for banter which is itself based on a mismatch between what is said and what is meant.

What could help us out of the definition conundrum is the focus on the pragmatic functions of irony. Dews et al. (2007: 316) bring out two “overarching” functions showing that they are “equally consistent” with a conception of irony as pretence or as echoic mention for instance. Here are the two main general functions their studies bring forward: irony aims to “save face” and “be funny”. The line from Tarantino’s film above clearly showed its power to trigger a smile. But irony, as the authors make clear, is also a way to protect the speaker’s face by making her appear “less angry” and more “in control of her emotions”. It thus allows the

speaker to maintain some damage control in relationships with addressees (297). Yet other authors (Kreuz et al. 1991; Toplak & Katz 2000; Colston & O'Brien 2000) have shown that it can be more biting than straightforward utterances (see Dynel 2016 for an explanation of these contradictory results that may lie in the different nature of the ironical examples chosen and of the methodologies applied). “Attacking” faces while “saving” faces could also be said to be the prerogative of the other discursive practice under study: banter.

4. Defining banter

4.1 A cultural approach

Defining banter is no easier than defining irony. Unlike the latter, though, banter is not a literary trope and, as a consequence, much less has been written on this discursive practice. When we look at the current, i.e. non-linguistic definitions of banter, it soon becomes obvious that it is closely related to other notions such as *joking*, *teasing*, *joshing* and such like. This semantic constellation of related yet different lexemes calls for further study and this is precisely the aim of the present book. Let us consider the definitions of the standard, non-technical *Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

(7) **Banter:** friendly conversation in which people make a lot of jokes with, and amusing remarks about, each other.

Josh: *old-fashioned* to talk to someone or laugh at them in a gentle joking way.

Joke: to say things that are intended to be funny and that you do not really mean.

Tease: to laugh at someone and make jokes in order to have fun by embarrassing them, either in a friendly way or in an unkind way.

What is striking is the overlap between these definitions, with “jokes” and “joking” being used for the definitions of *josh* and *banter*. In three cases, the innocuous character of the utterance is underscored (“gentle joking way”, “you do not really mean” and “amusing remarks”). *Tease* is the only one for which an unfriendly intention may be present (see Keltner et al. 2001). These lay definitions seem to be of little help to bring out, as it were, the nuances between these three terms. For *banter*, however, an element of reciprocity seems to be a crucial part of the definition and although it is not excluded from *josh*, *joke* and *tease*, it is not clearly foregrounded. As a consequence, joshing, teasing and joking may be one-sided while banter implies a tit-for-tat type of verbal interaction (see Dynel 2008:242 for distinctions between ‘teasing’ and ‘a tease’).

Although the origins of the term *banter* are uncertain, it is believed it comes from seventeenth-century London slang (*Oxford English Dictionary*) with the meaning of “good-humoured raillery”, which does not clarify the distinction between *banter*, *joking*, and *joshing*.

Another problem crops up when we try to translate *banter*. In French, for instance, it is translated either as *badiner* which is reminiscent of Alfred de Musset’s 1834 play, *On ne badine pas avec l’amour*, i.e. an old-fashioned and quaint term, or as *chARRIER* which is much more modern and colloquial. Although a comparison with other languages would be needed to substantiate this claim, it nevertheless seems that the notion does not really translate, suggesting therefore that banter may well be a cultural trait. Social anthropologist Kate Fox (2004:336) in a chapter entitled “The Rules of Banter” confirms the idea that it is intrinsically ‘English’:

- (8) In most other cultures, flirtation and courtship involve exchanges of compliments: among the English, you are likely to hear exchanges of insults. Well, mock-insults, to be precise. ‘Banter’, we call it, and it is one of our most popular forms of verbal interaction generally (on a par with moaning), as well as our main flirting method.

If Fox is correct, this ‘Englishness’ would explain the difficulty of translating the notion into other languages with the same nuances. Still, is banter ubiquitous in Britain as claimed by Fox? Evidence suggests that it is. Paul MacInnes describes it as a social phenomenon, more specifically:

- (9) Perhaps the pre-eminent form of male-to-male communication – bar the grunt – banter is the social glue at football clubs, the lingua franca of the internet (particularly Twitter), the means of exchange between strangers on a train. (*The Guardian*, “The art of banter: ‘It’s like a boxing match. It can be bruising’”, Tuesday 8 November)

Banter, or, more fashionably, *bantz*, indeed seems to be a very powerful trend today, unlikely to disappear overnight. On a more anecdotal note, we should also mention the existence of several “Banter Societies” such as the Oxford Drinking Society, “The Banter Squadron”. Less humorously perhaps, it is also in the news and in courtrooms with people using “banter” as a universal excuse to legitimise sexism, racism, bullying and verbal offence at large. Indeed, drawing the line between banter and genuine impoliteness is a task that requires that both external and internal factors be taken into consideration (Yule 1996), such as the context of the interaction, the degree of formality, the relationship between the participants (symmetrical or a-symmetrical), the degree of imposition, the topics tackled and so on.

Banter is a common everyday label and its meaning is constantly changing. What is more, like irony, it is open to negotiation during verbal interactions. When linguists talk about banter, what do they really talk about? Their definition of this discursive practice ought to be based on linguistic criteria whilst maintaining some relevance with the lay meaning, such as it is used in the media and in everyday life. This problem of definition is similar to that discussed by Watt (2003: 12–17) regarding (im)politeness and also concerns irony as mentioned earlier.

4.2 Linguistic approaches to banter

As suggested, much less has been written on banter than on irony. Still, Labov's 1972 sociolinguistic study and Leech's pragmatic model represent cornerstones.

Labov (1972) studies a heavily ritualised form of banter in a language game, variously named *sounding*, *signifying*, *woofing* or *the dozens*. As demonstrated by Labov, there are two types of sounding: i) ritualised, in which sounding is used *per se* and ii) applied, in which a member of a group uses sounding without being involved in a contest in order to gain control of the interaction at hand. This second type is of course closer to banter and requires a certain presence of mind, or wit. Conversely, in the case of ritualised sounding, Labov insists that the winner is not the most inventive speaker but he (it is usually a male activity) who manages to remember the greatest number of couplets. The most basic couplets are of the type:

- (10) 'Your momma drink pee?'
 'Your father eat shit.'
 (Labov 1972:308)

These lines are memorised and can be called upon instantly. This ritualised language game is very similar to what happens in everyday English when someone allows you to go first into a room, uttering the phrase: "Age before beauty", which triggers the traditional answer: "Pigs before swine". This practice is based on "adjacency pairs" (Levinson 1983) in traditional Conversation Analysis. What is worth pointing out is that this linguistic practice is ingrained in everyday interactions. Banter, in this case, seems to have undergone a process of "pragmaticalisation": the linguistic content has been bleached and the expression functions as a marker of procedural meaning (see Watts 2003). Labov's approach clearly falls within the remit of sociolinguistics. In his ground-breaking paper, he also offers a systematic analysis of the syntax and of the lexis associated with *sounding*. This way of going about language usage is close to what Leech (2014: 13) calls 'pragmalinguistics', i.e. a subdomain of pragmatics concerned with the linguistic form. However, by focusing on a specific language game typical of American ghettos, Labov is also,

unsurprisingly, concerned with what Leech (2014: 13) calls ‘sociopragmatics,’ oriented towards the social and cultural dimension of the interaction.

Leech’s pragmatic approach is based on Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP) as well as on his own Politeness Principle (PP) from 1983. Leech (2014: 243) neatly presents the overall organisation of his theoretical model as follows:

Table 1. A hierarchy of pragmatic principles (from Leech 2014: 243)

Hierarchy	Name of the principle	Phenomena it accounts for
Zero order	Cooperative Principle (CP)	Basic communicative cooperation
1st order	Politeness Principle (PP)	Politeness / impoliteness
2nd order	Irony Principle	Conversational irony, sarcasm (Mock politeness)
2nd / 3rd order	Banter Principle	Banter (mock impoliteness / rudeness; also potentially: mock sarcasm).

Leech’s Principle of Politeness (PP) supplements Grice’s Principle (CP): if the CP is flouted, it might be because the Politeness Principle takes over, because the speakers want to be polite. If, in turn, the PP is breached, it may be because the speaker is being ironic; the Irony Principle is thus a second-order principle as explained by Leech (1983: 82):

- (11) If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn’t overtly conflict with the Politeness Principle, but allows the reader to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.

From this perspective, banter and irony are actually exploitations of the PP, which leads Leech (2014: 100) to argue that the ‘Irony strategy’ and the ‘Banter strategy’ are second-order strategies used in violations of the CP and /or the PP.

Some specific research should be devoted to the shift from Leech (1983) to Leech (2014) as the author, in his last book, addresses most of the criticisms that have been levelled at his previous one and offers a completely revamped model. Suffice it to say here that irony (i.e. conversational irony) and banter (i.e. mock impoliteness) are studied in conjunction (both in 1983 and in 2014 with slight nuances). More specifically:

- (12) Irony maintains courtesy on the surface level of *what is said*, but at a deeper level is calculated to imply a negative evaluation. Banter is offensive on the surface but at a deeper level is intended to maintain comity.
(Leech 2014: 100)

For both irony and banter, Leech (2014: 101) talks of a “reversal of interpretation”. It is in fact a *chiasmic relationship* that is presented between irony, banter, politeness and impoliteness. In either case, Grice’s Maxim of Quality is flouted. Leech (1983: 144) describes his ‘Banter principle’ as a way of saying something which is ‘obviously not true’. In Leech (2014: 101), however, he rephrases his definition as follows: “the reversal of interpretation occurs because the discourteous remark cannot be treated as *serious*” (our emphasis). This change is in keeping with Culpeper (2011: 208) who prefers to consider cases of banter “in terms of an understanding on the part of the participant that the contextual conditions that sustain genuine impoliteness do not apply”.

Of course, the question of why we use banter is to be raised. Not only does it cancel the face-attack inherent in surface impoliteness, it also enhances and fosters in-group membership (Holmes 2000: 174), and/or camaraderie (Leech 2014: 239). Culpeper (1996) argues that banter ensures harmonious social and verbal encounters, thereby suggesting (but not quite) that it has become the default norm. Leech (2014: 241) also points out that in certain stressful environments, “banter has a positive function in allowing aggression to be expressed, but also in defusing its violent effects by promoting an atmosphere of friendly jocular-ity”. This is precisely the case in a conversation, taken from the British television series, *The Thick of It* (Season 3, Episode 4), in which Malcolm Tucker, the PM’s spin-doctor, comes across a senior Shadow Minister, Peter Mannion. Malcolm has no power over him; the relationship is therefore symmetrical; the two are obviously old acquaintances:

(13) MT: Ah, Peter!

PM: I didn’t know you were still alive.

MT: How’s the old ’80s tribute band going? Still doing the Robert Palmer look-alike thing, huh?

PM: Malcolm, you’re looking well for someone twice your age. Any news on the aneurysm?.

MT: Funny man, funny, funny man.

(III, 4)

The banter is robust and brisk. It is performed mainly through implicatures referring to age. “I didn’t know you were still alive” and “someone twice your age” are indeed face-attacks but because they are exchanged between middle-aged men, their scope is limited. The reference to the 80’s clearly plays on the same string although the reference to Robert Palmer (that is to looks) may be taken as a personal attack on the Minister’s hair-style which appears a bit dated. The reference to Malcolm’s impending aneurysm may also be regarded as a personal attack as it implies Malcolm’s behaviour betrays high blood-pressure and a state of gen-

eral stress. Banter is (i) reciprocated and (ii) the response is *proportional* to the face-attack. Neither Peter Mannion nor Malcolm Tucker loses face in this interaction. We notice the absence of taboo words and the use of cultural references (Robert Palmer) render this clever type of banter more entertaining as Peter Mannion does indeed look like Robert Palmer. This encounter is particularly effective because, on top of the propositional content of the utterances and the implicatures, the intonation contours as well as the gestures involved constitute clear signals as to how the utterances are to be taken. Indeed, paralinguistic and prosodic cues (Crystal & Quirk 1964, Crystal 1969 and also Brown 1990) are clear IFIDs (illocutionary Force Indicating Devices) allowing each speaker/hearer to construe banter, and of course irony, in verbal interaction. Several features can be singled out to locate banter and irony (see Keltner et al. 1998) but none is, in itself, sufficient to attribute a definite label to an utterance: working out the discrepancy between *what is said* and *what is meant* remains, at the end of the day, the main purpose of the Sisyphus-like pragmaticist.

5. Book contents

This book is divided into two parts. The first part comprises chapters revisiting, both theoretically and empirically, the notions of irony (and banter).

The following chapter is an attempt at situating irony within a theory of textual meaning. Lesley Jeffries indeed starts by underscoring the fact that several notions such as verbal irony, situational irony and even dramatic irony would benefit from being envisaged along similar theoretical lines. She uses a model of communication which encompasses a range of potential meaning including linguistic, textual, interpersonal and situational meaning. From the perspective of 'textual meaning', Jeffries reconsiders the 'clash' inherent in all types of irony, and compares the different possibilities (clash between text and text, between text and situation, between text and interpersonal situation etc.) and offers concrete examples that are thoroughly discussed. The neat interpretative model she presents highlights both the similarities and the nuances between the different analytical planes. This enables her to suggest new demarcation lines between irony and sarcasm and to touch upon their intricate links with banter. Jeffries finally tackles the main differences between irony, jokes, humour and hypocrisy as well as the overarching notion of paradox.

In Chapter 3 entitled "Deconstructing the myth of positively evaluative irony", Marta Dynel focuses on an infrequent use of irony that displays a positive evaluation dressed in negative terms. After showing why the more encompassing terms "positively evaluative" and "negatively evaluative" irony are preferable to

other equivalents (such as ironic praise/criticism or ironic compliment/criticism), she goes on to demonstrate that the vast majority of examples in the literature supposedly belonging to positively evaluative irony are inadequate choices: they partake of non-ironic humorous tease that fails the test of irony. Dynel's point is that the positively evaluative irony category is in fact redundant because this form of irony is itself necessarily based on a negatively evaluated antecedent that the positive evaluation comes to rectify or comment on. The positive evaluative implicature is indeed in some way "mitigated" by this allusion to previously held or expressed beliefs or opinions.

In the fourth chapter, Olivier Simonin singles out three distinctive mechanisms of verbal irony that he shows can co-occur or overlap in some occurrences to strengthen its impact: polar irony, impersonation irony and mock politeness irony. The first two amounts to the ancient rhetorical differentiation between a "trope" (that serves to say the opposite of what one means) and a "figure of thought" (that brings one to take a position or assume a different voice) and is akin to Simpson (2011)'s distinction between "oppositional" and "echoic" irony. Simonin however extends "polar irony" to the broader category of "contrastive irony" to encompass cases where the situation does not call for an exact reversal of what is said. Lastly the author offers his own definition of "mock politeness irony" mainly based on Leech's insightful theory. Although admitting and demonstrating that Leech's account of irony is both too narrow and too broad, he highlights its hermeneutic strength in understanding some key aspects of irony, but also of banter (under which "genteel irony" could be classified), in relation with politeness and impoliteness.

Lastly, Chapter 5 entitled "Irony and semantic prosody revisited" is devoted to semantic prosody in connection with a sketch from *Beyond the Fringe*, "Aftermyth of war". The author, Dan McIntyre, starts by pointing out that his approach is in keeping with Simpson's (2011) view of irony as a 'conceptual paradox'. McIntyre discusses Louw's (1993) ground-breaking article on semantic prosody and discusses the major issues and problems raised. For instance, he makes a distinction between semantic prosody (the discourse function of a unit of meaning) and semantic preference (a collocational pattern). He also stresses the fact that collocations are not either positive or negative and that there are many shades of meaning that require analytical finesse to do justice to semantic prosody. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of the following statement from "Aftermyth of war": "So, unavoidably, came peace, putting an end to organised war as we knew it". In this thorough and minute analysis, McIntyre shows the relevance of semantic prosody to study irony but is also careful enough to include other tools and theoretical approaches that are necessary to account for the diversity of ironic practices.

The second part of the book is devoted to the usage of irony and banter in literature from the 17th to the 19th century with specific contributions on Congreve (1670–1729) and Thackeray (1811–1863) before moving on to more contemporary discourse. Chapter 6 sets out to illustrate the specificities of the discursive practices of both irony and banter on the seventeenth-century London stage. In Congreve's witty dialogues, the first distinction to be made is between *Truewit* and *Witwoud*, something that was not always easy for the audience of the time. Furthermore, banter, a new term in the 17th century, was synonymous with "to cause offence" and therefore different from contemporary meaning although some overlap exists. Whether the character's statements should be taken as irony or as banter, Natalie Mandon shows that Congreve explores the discrepancy between apparent and intended meaning(s). What's more, just as the "bantered" party commonly feigns ignorance, so too the banterer skilfully disguises his knowledge in order to indulge in the discursive practice of irony without arousing the suspicions of his target. Although an analysis of the intricate interpersonal relationships between the characters represents the bulk of this chapter, Mandon also exposes Congreve's satirical design since, more often than not, the audience are also the victims of the dramatist's clever handling of irony and banter.

The subtle workings of irony (and banter to a lesser extent) in William Makepeace Thackeray's writings in a structural and pragmatic perspective are dissected in Chapter 7. Here Jacqueline Fromonot highlights the power of irony to reshuffle places and roles in configurations that involve author, narrator, character, over-hearer and reader. First delving into the device of self-directed irony, she shows that it both serves self-condemnation and self-promotion (critical distance conferring an ethos of superiority onto the ironist), and is also used as a pretext to get at others. Then focusing on irony targeted at others in the tradition of satire, she reveals that, *topologically*, irony can be predicated on a three-place structure involving narrator, characters and reader, as irony is sometimes "redirected" in "tropic communication", when what is already oblique gets deviated in its turn. Lastly, adopting a *topographical* approach, she emphasizes how the reader can succeed in finding her way in the tropic territory flagged by the writer, leaning on sign posts such as metaphors and hyperboles but also collocational mismatches or a certain use of punctuation and syntax. Serving the guiding as well can be the added presence of an intradiegetic commenter occupying yet another place in the intricate "place-working" of irony.

In Chapter 8, Linda Pillière tackles the problem of the definition of banter, grounding her analysis on the British TV programme *Pointless*. She starts with a sociological presentation of banter (and its evolution throughout history) before placing it in the perspective of existing theories and analytical frameworks. She approaches banter from the perspective of Jean-Jacques Lecercle's (1999) interac-

tional pragmatic model (ALTER). Through thorough analyses, she tackles both dyadic and multiple interactions which enable her to highlight the complexity of verbal exchanges and the necessity to distinguish between the five 'actants' inherent in Lecercle's framework. Pillière demonstrates the difficulty of assessing interpretation as it is continuously negotiated during verbal exchanges. Another interesting aspect of this chapter is the inclusion of paralinguistic (prosodic and gestural) phenomena to determine whether an utterance is to be regarded as banter or not.

Jan Chovanec focuses on the study of ironic reader comments in discussion forums and newspapers. The analysis is based on more than one thousand comments taken from the Czech online newspaper *idnes.cz.* and deals with the 2015 migration crisis. In this chapter, the author uses both pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis to present a refined taxonomy of irony. He distinguishes between first-order (reacting directly to what has been posted) and second-order comments (reacting to a previous reaction). Three broad types of irony seem to emerge: (i) arising from intertextual references and echoic mentions of other texts, (ii) revolving around self- and other-categorization and (iii) in fictionalized narratives. After analysing several examples of each category, Chovanec reaches the conclusion that irony is a particularly safe way of venting discordant opinions without having to present lengthy and structured arguments and without running the risk of exposing oneself to other commenters' attacks.

In the final chapter, Sandrine Sorlin analyses a promotional piece for the 2014 *Monty Python Live (Mostly)* show that massively hinges on irony and banter. Sorlin brings together several theoretical frameworks, including Text World Theory, to account for this intricate piece of traditional English humour. The irony displayed (from 'conversational irony' to 'dramatic irony') is indeed complex as Mick Jagger passes negative comments on Monty Python's comeback, these comments applying to himself and his enduring group as well. The use of banter is more straightforward as the Rolling Stones lampoon the Monty Python group and the obvious connivance between the different members of these two iconic groups adds to the humorous intent. At the same time, the irony and the banter displayed annihilate the potential criticisms that could be lodged against either group.

We are confident this book will renew readers' interest in irony and banter as it sheds new theoretical light on these two discursive practices. Not only does it discuss and question established analytical frameworks while suggesting new avenues for future research, but it also offers a stimulating diachronic perspective ranging from the past uses of irony and banter to their more recent exploitations.

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Irony in a theory of textual meaning

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This chapter attempts to map out different types of irony, using a model of communication which encompasses a range of potential meaning including linguistic, textual, interpersonal and situational meaning. It is argued that the resulting description of potentially ironic examples can help to show where apparently different types have overlap. It also attempts to demonstrate the boundaries of irony in relation to linguistic humour more generally and to articulate some of the distinctions between irony and other forms of apparent clash such as paradox and hypocrisy. The chapter concludes that irony can occur without intention and despite, not because of, an audience, though both intentionality and addressee(s) are needed for the most recognisable forms of verbal irony.

1. Introduction

When I was asked to contribute to this volume, my initial reaction was “I don’t know anything about irony.” My second thought was “Is it ironic that I have been asked to make some kind of expert statement about it then?” In thinking about the predicament I found myself in, I realised that if there was any irony in it, this was because of a clash between two situational truths:

- A. I know nothing about irony
- B. I’ve been asked to make some kind of ‘expert’ statement on it

This clash, of course, is between two non-linguistic facts, though linguists often tend to think of irony as primarily a linguistic phenomenon and we may connect it in particular to the kind of high style we associate with works of literary merit. However, we are also aware that the term is used frequently in daily life in relation to the kinds of situational irony that I sketched out above.

What, then, is the difference between the irony of, say, Jane Austen and that of everyday life? And how does dramatic irony fit into a larger model? These musings led me to wonder whether my recent work on textual meaning might help me to understand the relationships between these forms of irony and whether it

might be possible to construct a framework that helps us understand why we want to call them all irony, whilst recognising their differences.

Before I share the results of what has really been something of a ‘thought experiment’, I will mention some of the approaches to irony that have arisen in linguistics and neighbouring disciplines, though with limited attention to the literary-rhetorical literature which is vast and is summarised by Attardo (2000: 794) in the following way:

Most of the research on irony has been done within the paradigm of literary studies, with all the implied interest in its aesthetic and emotional value, and the corresponding lack of formalization.

This ‘lack of formalization’ in particular makes it difficult to compare and contrast linguistic and more literary approaches to irony and since I, like him, am interested in trying to model some aspects of the different types of irony, I will pay most attention to those who have tried to do so too.

Attardo (2000) summarises linguistic, psycholinguistic and pragmatic approaches in bringing their own ideas to bear on the topic. He limits himself to verbal (as opposed to Socratic irony, dramatic irony and irony of fate), and reviews the different approaches to irony in the psycholinguistic and pragmatic fields. His summary explains the various pragmatic approaches, many of them based on some kind of theory of echoic mention, and reviews the counter-literature from psycholinguistics, which appears to show that what he calls the ‘standard pragmatic model’ is disproved by experimental results. Attardo, however, argues that although Gibbs and others have disproved one of the possible predictions of the standard pragmatic model, there are other explanations which are in accordance with that model. Attardo himself marshals the various arguments which appear to undermine Grice’s theory (based on the Co-operative Principle) by pointing out that the two incongruous meanings of an ironic utterance are both in play at the same time, which is not compatible with Grice’s own approach. This leads Attardo to agree with what he calls ‘two-stage theories’, whereby it is considered that those on the receiving end of verbal irony will process the utterance twice and yet keep both senses in play (possibly through ‘togglng’ between the two) in order to perceive the ironic impact. He also concludes that the understanding or reception of irony depends entirely on inferential processing and to that extent is completely pragmatic and indirect. He sums up his approach: “irony is essentially an inappropriate utterance which is nonetheless relevant to the context” (Attardo 2000: 823). (See also Dynel in the present volume).

By contrast with Attardo, Giora et al. (2015) put forward a new theory, the defaultness hypothesis, which argues that defaultness takes precedence over non-default interpretations of utterances, “irrespective of degree of negation, non-

salience, non-literality, or context strength” (Giora et al. 2015:296). The significance for studies of irony, including their own on sarcasm, a sub-type of irony, is that although Giora et al. accept the two-stage explanation for the processing of apparently contradictory texts, they no longer prioritise literal meanings over non-literal ones, as they argue that in some cases the non-literal interpretation is more likely to be the default. Giora et al. test their hypothesis experimentally and conclude that as they argue that in some cases:

what makes one *non-salient* interpretation (e.g., negative sarcasm) faster to process than an equivalent non-salient counterpart (e.g., affirmative sarcasm) and faster yet than a *salience-based* alternative (e.g., negative literalness) is defaultness, rather than degree of non-salience.

Another approach which adopts a conversation analytic approach to the topic is Clift (1999) where the author makes the case for a Goffmanian model of how irony is negotiated in the throes of conversation. Clift makes the case for irony being seen as a shift of footing, a phenomenon that, as she says “shows what examination of self-contained ironies cannot. The irony does not necessarily lodge in the articulation of the utterance itself” (Clift 1999:546). Clift’s focus, then, is on the co-construction of irony in interactions, whereby the placing of an utterance in the context of other exchanges can be one of the definitive features which cause it to be interpreted as ironic.

There is a large literature concerned with the psycholinguistic processing of aspects of ironic utterances (e.g. Gibbs 1986; Gibbs 1994) for the very reason that they seem to privilege a clashing co-existence of interpretations rather than, as might be expected for the bulk of interactions, being resolved to a single interpretation. This means that irony has a special role in the testing and/or confirming of general hypotheses of communication, such as Gricean pragmatics, speech act theory or the Goffmanian participation framework, which perhaps explains why it has more notice taken of it than its frequency of occurrence might predict. (On this point, see Simonin in the present volume). Nevertheless, most linguistically-oriented approaches tend to be psycholinguistic or pragmatic in nature and few of them consider the textual aspects of irony in any depth, perhaps leaving that to the world of literary criticism and in particular the New Criticism of the twentieth century (see, for example, Booth 1974).

Work which is closer to my own approach is found in Simpson (2003, 2011) and his more recent contribution (so far unpublished) which takes a new direction. His (2011) definition is based on the concept of ‘paradox’ which I will try to distinguish from irony below. He defines irony as ‘the perception of a conceptual paradox’ (Simpson 2011:39) which emphasises the recipient’s viewpoint, though it doesn’t appear to determine whether paradox is wider than irony (i.e. does irony

only affect a subset of possible paradoxes or are they co-terminous?). Simpson, then, is clear that ‘irony’ is only an appropriate term for situations where any clash or mismatch has some link to discourse; in other words, there is a Schrodinger’s cat effect whereby irony requires an audience in order for it to be said to exist. There could be, theoretically at least, a situation in which an unobserved clash arises in a text, but as a result of it being unobserved (possibly because one of the meanings is unconnected to the topic at hand) it is not, in Simpson’s view, ironic.

In the rest of this chapter, I will be taking a slightly different approach, by trying to widen the definition to include situational irony (with or without audience) as part of a broader attempt to explain why phenomena as different as dramatic irony and verbal irony tend to attract the same label (i.e. irony) in the popular imagination. Simpson’s recent work (forthcoming) on irony is founded upon reader response experiments to establish how ordinary (non-specialist) users of language identify the core features of irony in everyday situations. I see the current chapter as coming at the same question from a deductive viewpoint, where Simpson is building up from an inductive set of data from his informants.

Simpson’s recent work (in prep) on irony is founded upon reader response experiments to establish how ordinary (non-specialist) users of language identify the core features of irony in everyday situations.

My small contribution to the debate does not engage directly with the interactional or the processing aspects of irony, but instead attempts to draw upon recent work relating to the place of textual meaning in wider theories of language, with the aim of producing a model which can encompass everything from verbal to situational and dramatic irony in a single framework. The model proposed below, therefore, neither challenges nor clashes with the conclusions of the work cited above, but there are a few places in which the two approaches may have something in common which could provide some support for each.

2. Textual meaning: The background

I will start from the premise that irony involves a clash of some kind. I will try to show that this clash can be located as occurring between different points in a framework of communication that arises from my recent work on textual meaning (Jeffries 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). In order to contextualise the discussion below, I will first summarise some of the main points of this work. I have recently attempted to argue that linguistics might be missing an opportunity by treating so much work relating to textual meaning as a kind of by-product of the main business of the discipline, or as an application of the core insights of linguistics to what is often called ‘language in use’. It seems counter-intuitive, as well as

unnecessarily reductive, to relegate everything from Pragmatics and Conversation Analysis to stylistics, discourse analysis and CDA as well as other forms of text linguistics, including corpus linguistics, to the periphery of the discipline, or to see them as ‘really’ belonging in another field altogether (e.g. seeing stylistics as part of literary studies). This is not to say that linguistics has necessarily consciously excluded textual matters from consideration. It is even perhaps a natural consequence of the growth of the discipline in so many directions, whereby scholars can spend their entire career in one of the sub-disciplines without really engaging with the question of what the overarching ‘theory of language’ is like which encompasses all these different endeavours.

If this tendency to compartmentalise different aspects of linguistic investigation is one problem, the other, opposite, tendency is found *within* some of these sub-disciplines, where the assertion is often made that you cannot understand texts unless you take into account not only the linguistic aspects, but also everything in the situational context, including the history of the participants, the multimodal aspects of the scenario and the socio-political and cultural context in which the whole is situated. The problem with this all-encompassing type of approach is that it is likely to produce models of communication which are overly complex and not susceptible to the kind of systematic investigation which has been the strength of modern linguistics in the last hundred years. The inclusion of every possible variable imaginable is simply likely, it seems to me, to result in the topsy turvy world of ‘Alice Through the Looking Glass’ summed up by: ‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.’

Starting from my initial attempt to apply CDA rigorously (Jeffries 2007) followed by the development of a set of tools for analysing the textual-conceptual aspects of texts (Jeffries 2010), I have been trying to re-situate text in a general model of language. Figure 1 shows the place that I see text as holding in a general theory of language. The idea behind Figure 1 is that in every text produced by a speaker or writer, there are decisions being taken not only on the linguistic level (i.e. about the lexis, syntax and phonology etc.) but also on the two levels that I have labelled ideational and interpersonal (loosely following Halliday 1985). The linguistic level is seen in this model as basic and underlying the other two. Though Halliday (2016: 49), appears to separate out the textual from the rhetorical or ideational, he does not make such a clear distinction between what lies behind language in use and its occurrence in texts. I want to keep the term textual for the ideational thread of meaning, as well as using his other terms slightly differently (Jeffries 2014: 471). The three sets of decisions taken by a language user are not necessarily conscious choices and are no more separate from each other than morphology, phonology and syntax are separate within the linguistic level. There

is no intention to suggest that separating them out in this way implies anything about cognitive processing loads and they are primarily intended to give the analyst a chance of focussing on one manageable aspect of a text at a time, in the same way that early descriptive linguistics did with the levels of language. However, I would also argue that if the language user can recognise the different strands of meaning identified in Figure 1, then some level of psychological reality can at least be claimed for their existence.

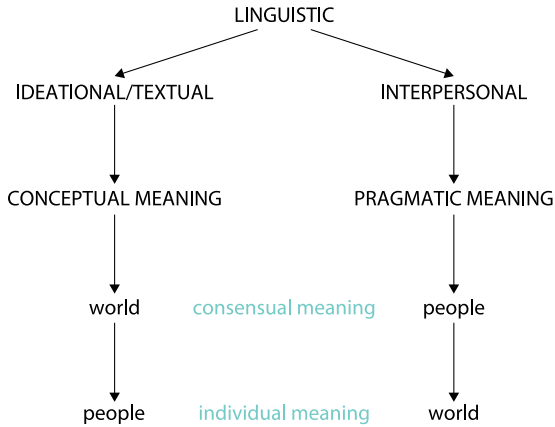


Figure 1. Placing textual meaning in a general theory of language

In starting to think about the place of irony in this model, I realised that I have missed something out, since the interpersonal strand of meaning is too specific to incorporate situational meaning which is not actively directed at another participant, though it may be significant as part of the communicative event. If we add this to the diagram, it may help to provide the basis of a typology of irony, as well as helping us tease out the (admittedly porous) boundary between consensual and individual meaning:

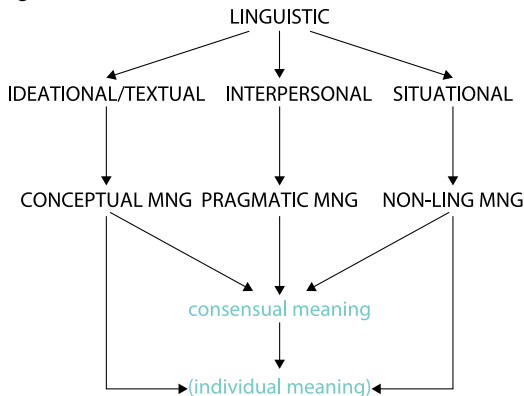


Figure 2. Adding situational meaning to a theory of language

In Figure 2, I have added a strand to cover the kinds of situational meaning that can contribute to the interpretation of a text, though at the moment, the precise nature and extent of this strand is not well defined. It may, for example, turn out to be a convenient way to bring together all the non-linguistic features of communicative events that are semiotic, but not linguistic. Or that may be too broad a category to try to bring together under one heading. Answering these questions is for another time, but here I hope to show that accounting for situational aspects of irony can occur within the same model as linguistic aspects.

In order to try and use this wider model of communication to help understand the phenomenon we call irony, I will start from the premise that it involves a clash of some kind. Note that Simpson's (2011) definition is based on the concept of 'paradox' which I will try to distinguish from irony below. In the rest of this chapter, I will be taking a slightly different approach, by trying to widen the definition to include situational irony (with or without audience) as part of a broader attempt to explain why phenomena as different as dramatic irony and verbal irony tend to attract the same label (i.e. irony) in the popular imagination.

To answer the question 'What is irony?', I will explore below the question of whether identifiably different instances of irony can be shown to occur at the interface between each pairing of the three strands of meaning shown in Figure 2, including pairings with themselves. Figure 3 shows the total number of possible pairings:

Clash→ ↓	Text	Interpersonal	Situational
Text	1. Text/Text		
Interpersonal	2. Text / Interpersonal	4. Interpersonal/ Interpersonal	
Situational	3. Text / Situational	5. Interpersonal / Situational	6. Situational/ Situational

Figure 3. Possible sites of ironic clashing in a theory of meaning

What is noticeable about Figure 3, compared with Figure 2 is that the basic, linguistic level of meaning is missing. In theory, there could be some clashes between the linguistic features (phonology, syntax, semantics) of a text and other features, but in considering the potential for this kind of clash, I found that the results tended not to look like irony. For example, some kind of a clash between two aspects of the linguistic structure of a text might produce puns (phonology/lexis) or structural ambiguity (syntax), but these would not usually be seen as being

ironic. I will return to an explanation of this apparent gap in the irony panoply below, but they seem to be qualitatively different from those clashes outlined in the next section, which all seem to share an ironic quality, despite their different communicative basis.

3. Typology of the bases of irony

The following discussion considers each of the potential sites of ironic clashes in turn, using the numbering from Figure 3 for ease of reference.

3.1 Text vs. text incongruity

The first type of irony in Figure 3 is found where there is a clash between two ideational aspects of the text. This includes examples where the clash is found within a phrase, leading to an oxymoron, such as *deafening silence*, *open secret* or *friendly fire*.¹ In these cases, the irony is that the noun phrase is naming something that cannot literally exist, because the semantics of the adjective are completely at odds with those of the head noun. The interpretation of such phrases depends on the recipient being able to reconcile the two parts of the construction, so that they understand how overwhelming absolute silence can be, and how the shooting of one's own comrades is anything but friendly and an open secret is one that is badly protected. Note, for the later discussion of paradox, that despite the clash there is a preferred meaning in these cases, because the silence is not deafening in its usual sense and the firing is definitely not friendly, however you perceive the inevitability of some collateral damage in war-fighting. The other potential type of text/text clash is between two aspects of a narrative structure in a longer text. This can be seen, for example, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner':

*Water, water everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink,
Water, water everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.*
(Coleridge 2014)

In this case, the text presents the reader with a world in which there is a clash between the availability of water, and the thirst of the protagonist. The irony here is, of course, situational, rather than textual, for the mariner himself and this

1. Friendly fire, of course, is not ironic to military personnel, as their activities in offensive warfare are called 'defensive' entirely unironically. Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this point, which emphasises the role of the producer/recipient in the perception of irony.

demonstrates one of the links between the various kinds of irony, where the same ironic clash can present differently, depending on the discourse participants. Clift (1999) used Goffman's participant framework to establish her approach to irony, based on footing. Nevertheless, because her discussion focuses on face-to-face interaction, she does not take into account the potential contrasts between discourse levels which can help us to describe the irony in more complex texts. The discourse structure model of fiction and other literature, proposed by Leech and Short (2007:206–218), envisages that there may be a number of levels of discourse, including implied author and implied reader, which are the idealised form of the reader and author as envisaged from the perspective of the other side of the communicative process. They may also have a number of layers of narration as, for example, in Coleridge's poem. Thus, the ideal narrator and the ideal reader in Leech and Short's model would share an appreciation of the irony of the ancient mariner's situation, based on the text of the poem, as would the actual author and reader. The Mariner himself, however, who is telling his story to the Wedding-Guest, sees his irony as situational, though he puts it into the text of his story and it is therefore textual for the Wedding-Guest. Figure 4 summarises the levels of discourse in this poem:

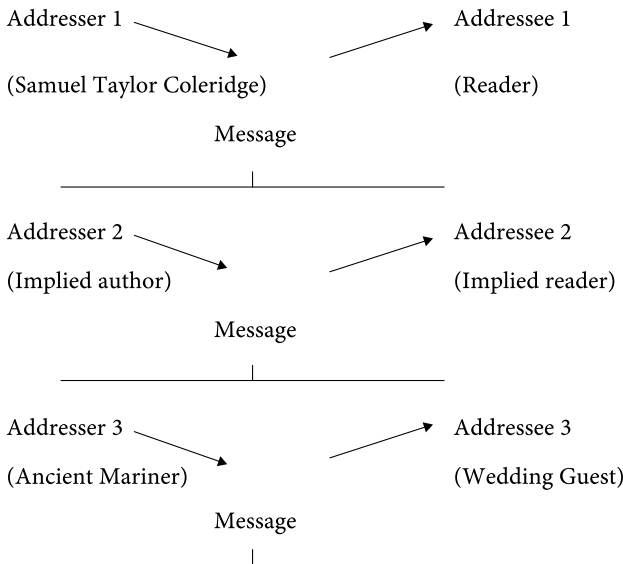


Figure 4. Discourse levels in Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'

At each level, the irony is presented textually, though the mariner is at pains to point out the reality of his experience, which is the (situational) irony of being unable to drink the water all around him.

3.2 Text vs. interpersonal meaning incongruity

The second potential site for incongruity leading to irony is where the textual meaning (i.e. the ideational meaning constructed by the text) clashes in some way with the interpersonal meaning. For example, someone congratulating their friend on a new baby might use an ironic textual construction of a world in which being a parent is not praiseworthy by saying “Well done for doing your bit for overpopulation.” In most cases, this could be interpreted between close friends as an example of banter whereby the norms of society (i.e. pleasure in babies) are reversed. This kind of incongruity often results in the kind of sub-type of irony that is labelled sarcasm, though the example above avoids that label, perhaps, because both the positive (well done) and the negative (overpopulation) are present, whereas with sarcasm, there is usually a criticism masquerading as a compliment, with the speaker intending exactly the opposite of what s/he says. For example, someone whose friend forgot to pick them up from the airport might say “You are such a good friend to me!” but clearly means the opposite.

There have been a number of attempts to develop a principled way of distinguishing between sarcasm and irony, but there is no agreed definition of either. Haiman (1998) claims that speaker intention is vital for sarcasm while irony may occur entirely without intention. As we noted earlier, in relation to Simpson’s recent work on reader’s responses to irony (forthcoming), there are also differing opinions as to whether an audience is required for irony to be recognised. It seems to me that the sub-types of irony I am trying to identify here by the location of their clashes are cut across by the question of (i) intention and (ii) audience.

In relation to resolution, here, the examples seem to me to either be resolved one way (sincere congratulations) or another (sarcastic airport friend), but can both clearly be identified as having a preferred interpretation in the context. I will return to this topic in discussing paradox later.

3.3 Text vs. situational incongruity

The third category of incongruity is where a text clearly clashes with some situational reality. There are many examples of this kind to be found, including the one pictured on the next page,² where the lorry advertises a product that is shown not to be working by the visual evidence of rust on the vehicle:

2. Source: <<http://www.viralnova.com/funny-ironic-photography/>> (4 August 2017).



The textual construction is by the process of naming here, where the text is a noun phrase which labels a set of products which are defined as corrosion resistant. There is a sense in which the noun phrase brings these materials into being, at least conceptually, so the evidence of rust on the lorry clearly undermines the existence of such materials in reality. This clash of situation with text is resolved to a preferred interpretation, as the materials are clearly not completely corrosion-resistant in fact. There is some interpretative effort required on the part of the reader here to recognise the joking effect of this image.

In cases such as these, which abound on the internet, there is a clearer sense that they are unintended than many of the more obviously discourse-based cases. The question of whether they are ironic even if they are not noticed by anyone is a moot point, but part of their entertainment value is the very fact that someone has noticed, though not the people who might be embarrassed by the ironic clash and perhaps should have noticed it! Thus, the unintentional nature of these cases makes the ironic observation by the audience all the sweeter.

3.4 Interpersonal vs. interpersonal meaning incongruity

The fourth type of incongruity arises where there is some kind of clash between the intended and expressed interpersonal actions, in particular the intended and actual speech acts. Unlike the text vs. interpersonal category example, above, where the congratulations are sincerely intended, despite being delivered in a way that apparently undervalues the reason for the congratulations, in the current category, there is a mismatch between the intended speech act and the expressed one. For example, a colleague asks “Can we PLEASE go to the staff training on power-point use again?” and is immediately interpreted as meaning “PLEASE don’t make

me go to this awful training session.” This category is clearly one where the term sarcasm could normally be used to sum up the effect.

The cases that would fit into this category are clearly both intentional and aimed at a particular audience, which as we saw earlier was a potential way of delimiting the sarcastic as a subset of the ironic. In addition, of course, there is a clear resolution in favour of the opposite meaning from the one expressed.

3.5 Interpersonal vs. situational meaning incongruity

For the fifth category, we can return to the woman whose friend forgot to pick her up from the airport. Instead of saying “you’re such a good friend” which we saw earlier brought about a clash between the textual (ideational) meaning and the situational meaning, the woman might choose to say “Thanks for picking me up at the airport!” In this case, she is bringing about a clash between the speech act she is performing (thanks) and the situation (the lack of a reason for thanks). In both cases, the term sarcasm may be used, to imply that something has been said which is not meant. In the earlier case, it was the ideation (you are not a good friend) and in the current case, the speech act, which was not intended.

This is another case which demonstrates that the more discourse-oriented the irony, the more clearly there is intention and an audience involved. I would argue, however, that this does not necessarily militate against including unintentional and/or unobserved irony being included in a model of the different types of irony which are popularly labelled as such.

3.6 Situational vs. situational incongruity

There are a great many situational ironies in history and around us in the world. The internet is particularly fond of listing these. Some of the ones listed there seem to belong to my Category 1, where something is said or written which clashes with the situation or what follows. Examples which properly belong in this category are the more slapstick cases such as a person being rescued from an accident, only to be run over by the ambulance. These are ironic – and usually funny – whether or not someone comments on them, and irrespective of any communicative act, though their humorous nature is in a sense only enacted once they are observed by some kind of audience.

4. Irony and other incongruities

We have already established that clashes at the basic linguistic level – in the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of language use – tend to produce not irony, but puns and ambiguity. Just to be clear, here are a few examples:

- Why did the little girl take the pencil to bed? To draw the curtains. (lexical semantic ambiguity of the word ‘draw’)
- DOCTOR TESTIFIES IN HORSE SUIT. (lexical semantic and syntactic ambiguity)
- I keep reading *The Lord of the Rings* over and over. I guess it’s just force of hobbit. (lexical ambiguity based on phonological similarity)

These and many more complex and narrative-based jokes have been examined by scholars investigating the linguistic basis of humour (e.g. Nash 1985). Though Nash and others (e.g. Simpson 2011) go way beyond the basic mechanistic aspects of their subject-matter, I would suggest that we can nevertheless draw a distinction between what is linguistic in the world of humour and what is more textual, and that this in turn helps us to draw a line between jokes and irony, where the latter may involve some kind of textual meaning (Categories 1–3 above) but not basic linguistic meaning.

We have also seen that certain types of irony can be labelled sarcasm, as long as there is at least some textual or interpersonal communicative act involved (Categories 2–5 above). In addition to puns/ambiguity and sarcasm, however, there are a number of further types of incongruity which it may be helpful to distinguish from irony in some way. These include paradox and hypocrisy, which I consider below to establish whether – and why – these differ from irony.

In the case of paradox, such as in the statement “I always tell lies”, there is a textual meaning, which is the surface meaning of the sentence and indicates that the speaker is an inveterate liar, but the logical conclusion (its entailment) is that the sentence must therefore also be a lie, which is incompatible with the surface meaning. This kind of textual paradox is more the preserve of mathematical logic and philosophy than everyday communication, though it can also provide the basis for the incongruity upon which jokes are based and humour is also often found in our everyday overstatements such as “Nobody goes to that restaurant, it’s too crowded” or “Don’t go near the water until you have learned how to swim.”

What seems to make a paradox different from irony, though, is that there is no preferred interpretation and so the clash cannot be resolved. The pleasure – or pain – for our brains in such cases is the impossibility of finding a way to comprehend both situations or truths at once, although in practice the clashing meanings resolve to a single meaning different from either of the two apparently incongru-

ous surface meanings.³ In cases of irony, there is always a way to explain the apparent clash, usually because one of the meanings is dominant, but sometimes also because the clash can be explained away. The similarity between paradoxes and irony is that they can both be based on a clash between two of the different strands of meaning; textual, situational and interpersonal.

Another case of incongruity which needs to be distinguished from irony – and also from paradoxes – is hypocrisy. On the surface, hypocrisy does not necessarily show up as a clash at all, since one may profess beliefs or feelings without the audience knowing that they are insincerely held or contradicted in practice. However, there are many cases, particularly in public life, where the mismatch between text and situation can clearly be seen as in the following statement from John Kerry, US Secretary of State, in 2014, on the actions of Russia in ‘annexing’ the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine:

You don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th-century fashion, by invading another country on a completely trumped up pretext.⁴

Critics of U.S. foreign policy in the late 20th and early 21st century would point out that John Kerry himself has been party to exactly the same kind of behaviour as he is disapproving of. Hypocrisy is usually the result of either a text-situation clash or a clash between two different texts produced by the same person, who perhaps appears to agree with incompatible statements at different times. This kind of behaviour can, of course, be interpersonal, where the speech act of agreeing with two contrasting beliefs could be simply the result of polite behaviour rather than genuine hypocrisy.⁵ This can happen when we are in a situation where strangers are engaging with each other in what is sometimes called phatic communion, such as on public transport or in the doctor’s waiting room. We might agree with friends about something political or social in reality and then shortly afterwards agree with a stranger on exactly the opposite side of the case. If anyone is with us and hears the two contradictory statements, they might charge us with hypocrisy, but we might counter with the defence that we were being polite.

In neither case is the incongruity ironic and each of the two different and incompatible beliefs or opinions is separately declared, though they cannot in fact be held *in tandem*. Note, however, that as flawed human beings we do often pro-

3. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this nuance relating to paradoxes.

4. This statement was made to the CBS program “Face the Nation” in March 2014. A report on his statement can be found from Reuters News Agency via their website: <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-usa-kerry-idUSBREA210DG20140302>>.

5. This phrase in itself appears to be paradoxical, but unlike real paradoxes (that’s another one!), it can be explained because the adjective (genuine) refers to the condition of being a paradox and not to the paradoxical situation per se.

fess contrasting views at different times, sometimes not even realising that they are incompatible. The recent referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union has produced many such incompatible statements from members of the public struggling to understand the issues and decide how to vote. It was a common occurrence to hear people interviewed on TV and radio who declared that there are 'too many' European immigrants in the UK, whilst praising the work of those who keep the National Health Service going, a great many of whom are from the EU. These are incompatible on a relatively deep political level, and so could not be called hypocrisy, though they, and the whole Brexit debacle, may well be paradoxical in failing to deliver the kinds of 'control' and increased public spending on health and other fields that the Leave campaigners predicted and the Leave voters wanted.

5. Dramatic irony

I have not mentioned so far the place of dramatic irony in my typology, despite this being one of the better known types of irony amongst literary scholars and students. An example would be where the audience of a play or film (or indeed the reader of a novel or dramatic monologue such as Browning's 'My Last Duchess') has knowledge about something that is not plain to the characters and which in some way clashes with their intended or actual actions or words. This allows the reader/observer to experience something of the same kind of *Schadenfreude* which I mentioned in relation to Type 6 of the ironic typology above (see Section 3.6) where there is some kind of clash of situation such as an ambulance running over the victim it has come to attend to. Whilst everyday clashes of this kind are rare in practice, though much discussed when they do occur, classic dramatic irony is one of the most useful of devices for writers who are effectively constructing the situation in which an unintended – and to the participants unobserved – irony is played out.

Though the case of situation-situation clashes appears to link most clearly to dramatic irony, in fact dramatic irony can occur in relation to other clashes, as long as there is no intentionality involved and no audience present in the situation to bear witness to it. It may be that Leech and Short's (2007) model of discourse structure could again be helpful here, in situating the ironic clash not at the level of character-to-character interaction but at one of the higher levels, or even between different levels. This could be one way to provide more accurate descriptions of where dramatic irony (and possibly also other rhetorical figures) is situated in the whole communicative event, making it possible to compare works of fiction directly through an agreed framework.

This link between dramatic irony and the less discursive types in my discussion here seems to me to be a good reason for adopting some kind of framework which allows us to bring together verbal irony with other forms, not least since they would be popularly seen as belonging together by lay people, I think.

6. Conclusions about irony

As I started on this piece of writing, I was unsure that irony was objectively separable from some other incongruities in communication and there are still individual cases which make it difficult to see where the boundaries are, at times, between irony and other forms of linguistic or situational clash, such as hypocrisy, paradox, punning or ambiguity.

However, testing out the differences in clear cases, using the four strands of communicative meaning (linguistic, textual, interpersonal and situational) embedded in the model I proposed at the beginning of this chapter has perhaps helped to throw some light on the boundaries of ironic clash, which do not include linguistic clashes (such as puns); on the types of ironic clash, which can help to demonstrate the places where sarcasm is also a potentially appropriate label and also on the various types of irony. In addition, we have seen that the concepts of discourse structure and preferred or dominant meaning might help us fully distinguish all the forms of ironic clash that have been explored in this chapter. Finally, I would argue that the clear case of dramatic irony can be explained by reference to the typology, which should act not as a categorisation, but as a set of idealised reference points to facilitate our discussions of individual cases of potential irony.

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Deconstructing the myth of positively evaluative irony

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Adopting a neo-Gricean perspective on the figure of irony, this chapter critically examines the species of irony that communicates positive evaluation in its implicated meaning. A critical overview of the existing scholarship on this type of irony is performed, with the focus being on the rationale for its intermittence and on the available examples. Further support is thus given to a view that irony must implicate negative evaluation. In the case of irony couched in overtly untruthful negatively evaluative expression of one referent, a negatively evaluated antecedent (another referent) is necessary. The speaker's intention to convey the latter form of evaluative implicature lies at the heart of irony, whilst the positively evaluative implicature is just an optional concomitant.

1. Introduction

Most authors who study the pragmatics of irony, understood as a rhetorical/stylistic figure, are unanimous that the central goal underlying the use of this figure is to perform *evaluation* (e.g. Grice 1989b[1978]; Myers Roy 1978; Holdcroft 1983; Haverkate 1990; Dews & Winner 1995; Glucksberg 1995; Hartung 1998; Creusere 1999; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Hamamoto 1998; Attardo 2000; Utsumi 2000; Kotthoff 2003; Partington 2006, 2007; Garmendia 2010, 2011, 2015; Kapogianni 2011; Gibbs 2012). Whilst evaluation is a hallmark of all its manifestations, irony may serve specific communicative purposes in different contexts, such as presenting oneself as being interesting, incisive, dramatic and memorable (Partington 2007) or inducing humorous responses in the hearers (see Dynel 2013a, 2014 and references therein).

Although the evaluative potential of irony is unquestionable, there is an ongoing debate concerning its capacity to mitigate or exacerbate negative evaluation that it communicates. Several research findings testify that irony mitigates the harshness of a critical remark (Dews & Winner 1995; Dews et al. 1995; Jorgensen

1996), thereby serving politeness (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). By contrast, other studies indicate that it renders negative evaluation more virulent and hurtful in comparison to its non-ironic counterpart, being a tool of impoliteness (e.g. Kreuz et al. 1991; Colston 1997, 2002; Toplak & Katz 2000; Colston & O'Brien 2000). These contradictory findings can be explained by irony's heterogeneous nature, diversified examples, as well as different methodologies employed by the authors (see Dynel 2016a).

The idea that irony exerts positive/mitigating effects on face-threatening acts can be traced back to Leech's (1983) famous distinction between the Irony Principle and the Banter Principle, which has inspired research on mock (im)politeness (e.g. Culpeper 2011; Haugh & Bousfield 2012; Taylor 2016, see also Chapter 6 in the present volume). Leech (1983:144) states that *banter* "is an offensive way of being friendly (mock-impoliteness)". Mock impoliteness is based on "underpoliteness" or "lack of politeness" deployed with a view to "establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity" (Leech 1983:144). However, in humour studies, banter is considered a broader category of friendly conversational humour devoid of aggression (e.g. Chiaro 1992; Norrick 1993), and it tends not to involve mock impoliteness (see Dynel 2016b). The fact that one label is used for different phenomena has led to conflicting postulates, as Haugh and Bousfield (2012) observe.

More importantly, according to Leech, irony amounts to "an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock-politeness)" (1983:144). The Irony Principle allows people to "bypass politeness" and consists in "politeness that is obviously insincere" (Leech 1983:142). Leech's main proposal in reference to irony is that it exerts mitigating effects on offensiveness, keeping "aggression away from the brink of conflict" (1983:144), and being "a substitute for impoliteness" (1983:142). It seems that Leech deems irony a politeness vehicle for communicating face-threatening meanings. However, in a more recent monograph, Leech (2014:232) presents the label of "conversational irony" as being synonymous with that of "sarcasm", which is indeed the prevalent term in impoliteness research (e.g. Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 2011). Specifically, in impoliteness scholarship, sarcasm is presented as an interpersonally disruptive type of irony (see Dynel 2017a for discussion and references). However, it must be stressed that sarcasm (understood as sarcastic irony) need not serve mock politeness, and mock politeness can take forms other than sarcasm (see Taylor 2016). On a higher plane, irony does not need to exhibit the characteristics of sarcasm (which is biting and hurtful) and may be perfectly benign, even if critical. Also, in multi-party interactions, it may bring about politeness effects to one individual and impoliteness effects to another (see Dynel 2013a). Overall, it seems that whether or not irony promotes impoliteness depends on contextual factors (e.g. the relationship between

the interlocutors) and the form of the utterance (i.e. how exactly the negative evaluation is communicated. See Chapter 4 in this volume).

A pending query is whether or not irony can be conducive to pure politeness effects by communicating positive evaluation. In the literature, a distinction tends to be made between what is here called *positively evaluative irony* (a negative expression implicating a positive intended meaning) and *negatively evaluative irony* (a positive expression implicating a negative intended meaning). These umbrella terms are seen as preferable to *ironic praise* (negative literal meaning conveying positive ironic meaning) and *ironic criticism* (positive literal meaning carrying negative ironic meaning) (Colston 2000; Hancock et al. 2000; Schwoebel et al. 2000; Harris & Pexman 2003; Kreuz & Link 2002; Colston & Gibbs 2007; cf. Burgers et al. 2012), or *ironic compliment* and *ironic criticism* (Dews et al. 1995; Hancock et al. 2000; Gibbs & Colston 2012). The latter labels may be considered ambivalent if not accompanied by definitions/reformulations. In addition, “negative evaluation” and “positive evaluation” are broad terms which capture subordinate ones, such as ridicule, criticism and condemnation, or compliments and praise respectively. As the title of this chapter reveals, the distinction between positively and negatively evaluative irony will be shown to be redundant. This goal will be achieved on the strength of a neo-Gricean definition of irony as a rhetorical figure that involves *overt untruthfulness*,¹ dependent on the flouting of the first Maxim of Quality (“Do not say what you believe to be false”, Grice 1989a[1975]) which promotes an evaluative conversational implicature (see Dynel 2013b, 2016c for further discussion). In irony, this overt untruthfulness (whether explicit or implicit) necessarily promotes the central meaning in the form of an evaluative implicature (see Dynel 2013b, 2014; see also Chapter 8 in this volume). Therefore, overt untruthfulness and implicated evaluation can be considered the necessary conditions for irony. These are the conditions that all validated examples of irony found in the previous scholarship do meet.

The method of data collection is one of the central methodological problems haunting the studies on irony (see Dynel 2017a). As this discussion will reveal, the ongoing debate on the positively/negatively evaluative irony has been spurred by inadequate choice of examples. This chapter draws on instances of irony which can be found in the topical theoretical literature. Mostly fabricated by the authors, they are frequently presented only sketchily (without much context) in the original works but are crucial for the arguments the authors make about what they consider to be “irony”. Upon closer inspection, these instances do not qualify as irony at all or are not well-formed empirically.

1. This overt untruthfulness may, however, be implicit, arising at the level of an as if implicature in the cases when an ironic utterance coincides with truthful meanings.

The present chapter is organised into five sections. Section 2 focuses on the question concerning the paucity of examples of positively evaluative irony and provides a critical survey of the extant literature. Section 3 examines the examples of positively evaluative irony found in the scholarship, many of which are shown to be misguided. Section 4 presents a *sine qua non* for well-formed irony which involves an overtly untruthful negatively evaluative expression: a negatively evaluated antecedent. In Section 5, final remarks are offered in favour of the view that irony inherently centres on implicated negative evaluation, whilst positive evaluation (based on reversing the meaning of an overtly untruthful negative expression) is only one of the many concomitants of irony, not a frequent one at that.

2. Infrequency of positively evaluative irony

Grice is widely known for holding that irony can convey only a negative judgement. In his words, “I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt” (1989b[1978]:53–54). However, numerous authors (e.g. Muecke 1969; Myers Roy 1978; Brown 1980; Kaufer 1981; Sperber & Wilson 1981; Gibbs 1986; Haverkate 1990; Dews & Winner 1995; Kreuz 1996; Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989; Creusere 1999; Attardo 2000; Colston 2000; Hancock et al. 2000; Schwoebel et al. 2000; Dews et al. 1995; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Kreuz & Link 2002; Harris & Pexman 2003; Matthews et al. 2006; Colston & Gibbs 2007; Burgers et al. 2012; Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014; Wilson & Sperber 2012) argue that the ironically expressed evaluation of a referent may be positive (praising or complimenting) and not necessarily negative (criticising, condemning, mocking, ridiculing etc.). Whilst making this distinction, many authors grant that more frequently, and hence typically, irony carries negative evaluation or expresses a derogatory attitude (e.g. Colston 1997; Sperber & Wilson 1981; Dews et al. 1995; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Gibbs 2000; Attardo 2000). This type of irony is prevalent both in real discourse and in the examples used by most researchers.

Several attempts have been made at explaining the bias in favour of negatively evaluative irony, which Clark and Gerrig (1984) call the *asymmetry of affect*. One of the explanations is that saying something negative that one does not honestly believe to be true leads to misunderstandings more easily than saying something positive. This is because the former type of utterance seems to not only flout the first Maxim of Quality but also violate the maxim of politeness, which is, nonetheless, applied deliberately because a positive judgement is actually communicated (Myers Roy 1978: 180, Haverkate 1990: 90–91). Consequently, since it

fails to observe two maxims (if “politeness” can be considered a maxim at all, next to Grice’s), an ironic utterance couched in a negative expression is more difficult to understand. This explanation is debatable. The discussion of (im)politeness effects of irony aside (which are only marginally dependent on the literal means of expression), it is doubtful whether saying something seemingly impolite adds cognitive load to an overtly untruthful expression. The difficulty of understanding an utterance depends rather on the degree of its implicitness, which cuts across the politeness – impoliteness division. Also, the possibility of a misunderstanding applies equally to all irony, being an unpredictable communicative anomaly consequent upon various factors (see Dynel 2017b). In any case, a potential misunderstanding can hardly be treated as a plausible explanation for the disproportion between the two types of irony.

On the other hand, Giora (1995) holds that irony rendered by a negative statement is harder to process, involving more cognitive effort on the interpreter’s part, which can also account for its infrequency. In the light of Giora’s (2001) Indirect Negation View, ironic interpretation is obtained by negating the salient meaning (i.e. that coded in the mental lexicon, as affected by frequency, familiarity, conventionality or prototypicality), and prompted by the discrepancy between the statement and the context. According to Giora (2001, 2003), ironically verbalised compliments introduce more difficulty in the process of comprehension on the grounds that the literal meaning is subject to double negation. However, other researchers report that positively evaluative irony is actually readily understood when it echoes a previously stated belief (Gibbs 1986; Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989) and when it alludes to some prior expectation, norm, or convention (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). The normative bias in irony in the context of the ease of interpretation is also discussed by Wilson and Sperber (2012). Negatively evaluative irony couched in explicit positive expressions is generally subject to easy retrieval, whilst positively evaluative irony is more easily understood if preceded by corresponding negative utterances or predictions, which (according to the relevance-theoretic account) is thus echoed.

For their part, Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) observe that irony that uses “negative statements” necessitates “explicit antecedents” (see Section 4), which positive statements do not require. In the authors’ view, this is because the latter allude to societal norms and expectations, which are typically positive. The asymmetry of affect is also attributed to the general prevalence of positive norms and expectations, the violation of which leads to negative events (Sperber & Wilson 1981; Sperber 1984). Consequently, it is (ostensibly) positive statements that carry irony orientated towards negative evaluation after a positive norm has been diverted from. This line of reasoning has evident shortcomings. First of all, an ironic utterance need not be a statement and irony need not involve any pos-

itive or negative evaluation marker (see Dynel 2013b). Second, the positive formulation and evaluation of societal norms is not a clear-cut issue. For instance, drinking alcohol is generally frowned upon, but it is open to question whether the societal norm/expectation along the lines of “Drinking alcohol is bad” or “Alcohol is harmful” is positive or not; it may be considered benevolent (positive) but it is couched in a negative word. Additionally, drinking can elicit contradictory evaluations in people. In some contexts (at least, in some cultures), drinking alcohol can be considered something positive, testifying to solidarity and an ability to socialise and have fun. Thus, literally saying “You drank almost half a bottle of whiskey yesterday!” may serve as an act of reproach (negative evaluation) or, perhaps less obviously, admiration (positive evaluation), depending on who the speaker is and what the context is. The positive evaluation may apply, at least from a speaker’s perspective, in the following context: a groom-to-be, a teetotaler, does not wish to drink anything even during his bachelor party but his friends cajole him into it (boys will be boys); the next morning one of the friends says, “You drank almost half a bottle of whiskey yesterday! I’m proud of you!”. Therefore, it cannot be said that the societal expectation of not drinking alcohol is unequivocally positive or negative (“drinking alcohol is good” vs. “drinking alcohol is bad” hold equally depending on the context), and both may serve irony.

Many of the authors quoted above are right in claiming that positively evaluative irony must be based on echoing/alluding to a previously expressed belief, expectation or opinion. Put simply, the interlocutors must necessarily share some background knowledge of events, utterances or opinions, in order to successfully communicate and understand all ironic utterances. There is a simple explanation for this: these necessary antecedents are actually the referents of the ironic (negative) evaluation.

3. Positively evaluative irony

Despite the prevalent agreement that irony may convey positive evaluation, relevant examples in the literature are not too frequent and some of them actually fail to meet the necessary conditions: overt untruthfulness (whether explicit or implicit) and the central meaning in the form of an evaluative implicature (see Dynel 2013b, 2014). It must be emphasised that “irony” is here understood as a technical, scholarly label for the relevant rhetorical figure, not a lay notion which language users (and some researchers alike) use with regard to humorous overt untruthfulness (see Dynel 2017a). Some authors wish to focus on the figure, but (unwittingly) conflate it with humorous phenomena, frequently fixated on prov-

ing that irony can carry only positive evaluation. This problem shows in a large proportion of the few examples found in the literature.

Here is a frequently quoted example of a stockbroker who says, “Sorry to keep bothering you like this” as he calls the third time on the same night to inform the addressee about unexpected dividends (Brown 1980: 114). This utterance can hardly be classified as ironic. It is a possibly humorous but still truthful comment on the situation. Objectively, the stockbroker is truly bothering the client, keen to break excellent news to him, which is a good excuse for calling many times. The same applies to the statement “These American-made cars that break down after 100,000 miles!” (Attardo 2000: 796). Although this utterance does involve a negative notion (“break down”), it ultimately carries positive information, which does not arise as an implicature even if necessitating some background information or inferencing: 100,000 miles is a long distance for a car. A similar example can be found in the statement “You are so naughty,” which is told by a woman to her husband who “has juggled his traveling expenses and bought her a nice present” (Hamamoto 1998: 263). Whilst the adjective “naughty” does carry a mildly negative evaluation, the woman actually means to thank her husband for the nice present. Therefore, this example can hardly be treated as irony, being instead humorous teasing. This is supported by the fact that the adjective is typically used to reproach children. At the same time, the speaker cannot be said to be overtly untruthful. She means to communicate that her husband is guilty of a financial misdemeanour, whilst she is actually quite happy to have benefited from it. A real-life example is provided by Alba-Juez and Attardo (2014: 100) when they refer to the hearer’s reaction to the allegedly ironic utterance: “Daniel comes back home from school and shows his father his report-card, which is full of As, to which his father reacts in the following manner: Father: Daniel, I’m really worried; your grades are terrible! (with blank face), Daniel: (giggles) Thank you, Dad”. The giggles in the real-life example indicate the son’s humorous response, the elicitation of which must have been the father’s intention apart from complimenting his son. Daniel must realise that his father is pulling his leg and does not mean to criticise him, with such criticism being unfounded. The father’s utterance exhibits overt non-ironic untruthfulness that only happens to concern evaluation (the grades are wonderful, not terrible) and that is used for humorous purposes (see Dynel 2013a, 2014, 2017c). If the scenario were modified and Daniel were presented as overly modest, his father’s utterance could teasingly target this feature and could indeed be considered ironic, as explained in Section 4. Overall, none of the examples examined so far qualifies as irony.

The literature also offers a list of examples couched in negatively evaluative words, which are mentioned in passing and not explained, such as “How small you’ve grown!” said to a child, or “I don’t like you at all” said by one lover to

another (Haverkate 1990:90). Similarly, Burgers et al. (2012:232) illustrate what they call “ironic blame” with “That’s a bad grade”, uttered when somebody has received A+. Without any contextual factors (and such are not provided in the papers cited), it is difficult to tell why anybody should actually produce any of these utterances, which appear to be fabricated by the authors. If at all possible in natural language use, these utterances may be considered humorously overtly untruthful but not ironic. The same can be said about two other examples. Kotthoff (2003:1390) quotes a remark “laughingly made by a guest as a comment on a sumptuous menu: ‘Once again something simple out of a can’” as an example of a positively evaluative irony. This utterance may work as a humorously paid compliment on the cook’s zeal. Finally, Schwoebel et al. (2000) present a very intriguing case of an utterance “You have a hard life” addressed to a friend going off to the Caribbean for an all-expense-paid holiday. Interestingly, this can hardly be interpreted as positively evaluative implicature promoted by a negative expression, for the implicated meaning (“You have an easy life”), depending on the context, may be an expression of envy or even criticism, albeit veiled in humour. This instance indicates that the “positive” vs. “negative” labels need to be assigned to words and expressions with care on the strength of the context. Essentially, all of the hypothetical utterances are characterised by overt untruthfulness and are humorous but not ironic.

Making a similar point, Garmendia (2010) addresses the following example: a person says “It’s going to be difficult to park” when, together with a companion, he has arrived at an empty parking lot (Garmendia 2010:408). The author rightly concludes that the speaker must be communicating the opposite meaning “It’s going to be easy to park”, which is obvious to the hearer, so the utterance may even be deemed “nonsensical”. Indeed, there is hardly any other meaning, apart from the obvious one, that the speaker wishes to communicate to the hearer. However, the sense of this utterance may be sought in its interpersonal phatic function: the speaker is “only joking” and produces the overtly untruthful comment on the obvious situation at hand in order to amuse the hearer (even if the example is not presented in this light).

On the whole, most of the examples listed so far are tantamount to non-ironic humorous (truthful or overtly untruthful) utterances, which are indeed frequently mistaken for irony (Dynel 2013a, 2014). A more plausible group of examples that motivate the existence of positively evaluative irony is premised on an assumption of some kind of antecedent utterance. Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989:377) discuss the case of a woman saying “This certainly is awful weather” and thereby alluding to a faulty forecast of rain (see also Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). A similar case is that of an utterance “You certainly don’t know how to cook” addressed to a cook who had claimed culinary incompetence only to prepare a superb dinner

(Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). In yet another example, a speaker says, “you sure are a *bad* basketball player’ after a player had said he was a bad player, but then played well” (Colston & Gibbs 2007: 15). Along these lines, Alba-Juez provides an example about a student who, lacking confidence, frets that he has failed an exam, but when the results arrive it turns out that he has passed with a very good mark; this invites the following comment: “Oh, yes, you have failed, you did it all wrong, you are a very bad student!” (1995: 11). Rightly, Alba-Juez (1995) considers this utterance to involve both praise of the student’s performance and criticism of the student’s previous self-deprecating attitude, but she seems to regard both aspects as being equally relevant. Similarly, Alba-Juez and Attardo (2014: 101) recognise a peculiar combination of positive and negative evaluations in this example: “An actress to one of her friends (F): A: I’m a total disaster. I’m never going to make it in the theatre world. I’m a rather mediocre actress. After some time, A gets an important award in recognition for her artistic performance, and after the ceremony her friend approaches her and says: F: Congratulations, dear friend! You certainly ARE a mediocre actress. I don’t know how they could give you this award!” As the authors acknowledge, the ironic utterance combines a positive evaluation of the actress’s performance and a negative evaluation of her previous self-deprecatory judgment, representing the speaker’s “mixed feelings” (Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014: 102). What these few examples have in common is the combination of positive and negative evaluations of two distinct referents. The negatively evaluated one is an antecedent produced by the hearer of an ironic utterance or someone else. This appears to be the necessary condition for irony which involves negatively evaluating words and which conveys a positive evaluation, next to a negative evaluation. This explains why the examples revisited at the beginning of this section do not qualify as irony: they all lack the necessary antecedent.

4. Negatively evaluated antecedent

The presence of an evaluated antecedent is considered *sine qua non* for well-formed positive irony. Addressing this issue, Wilson and Sperber, (2012: 127) state that ironic comments based on negatively evaluative words, such as “How clumsy” said in reference to someone who has been graceful, “are only appropriate when some prior doubt about the performance has been entertained or expressed”. This kind of echoing a previous utterance lies at the heart of the relevance-theoretic approach to irony (even though the echo-mention conceptualisation is much broader and encompasses a host of other notions, such as popular opinions or standard norms), which is why it easily captures “positive irony”.

Sperber and Wilson are not the first researchers to have argued that irony by negative statements is possible provided the ironist alludes to an explicit antecedent, such as a faulty forecast of rain (Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989); or a general expectation, such as that regarding commonplace dirty subways, which is thwarted by a clean one (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Glucksberg 1995). This means that, in the authors' opinion, the expectation or norm alluded to may also be tacit, being a matter of a widely held belief, rather than any specific utterance. The broadening of the negatively evaluated antecedent to cover unexpressed widely held beliefs may give rise to misgivings, unless they are salient or have been brought to the speaker's and hearer's attention. Taking Kumon-Nakamura et al.'s (1995) example, a comment "New York subways are certainly dirty!" on seeing a very clean subway can hardly be taken as a well-formed irony, unless, for instance, a famous documentary about dirty subways in New York has been broadcast the previous night on television. There has to be some anchoring referent of the negative evaluation, rather than a general backgrounded assumption with no specific target (typically, a particular speaker). This critical echoing of unspoken assumptions may lead to classifying non-ironic utterances as irony, as the following case also indicates. Commenting on Hamamoto's (1998) "You are so naughty" example (which has been shown not to qualify as irony in Section 3), Sperber and Wilson (1998:288) claim that the ironic speaker echoes and dissociates herself from the "justifiable public criticism". This line of reasoning leads to a conclusion that the speaker evaluates negatively the "public criticism". Rationally, this cannot be the case. The wife must recognise her husband's wrongdoing, but she simultaneously appreciates the positive outcome of his rule-infringing act.

In short, if there is an overtly untruthful negatively evaluative expression² in an utterance, this utterance can be considered ironic only if there is another referent to be evaluated negatively, as all the relevant examples found in the literature indicate. This referent takes the form of a specific utterance (or a set of utterances) communicating a belief the ironic speaker evaluates negatively. The speaker's intention is the motivation for the use of irony, even though his/her utterance does pivot on an explicitly negative expression which has to be reversed to yield the intermediate positively evaluative implicature. This means that without a specific negatively evaluated antecedent, the irony in question cannot come into being.

Examining Wilson and Sperber's (2012) "How clumsy" example and its discussion, Garmendia (2015) correctly observes that the referent of the negative evaluation is the comment expressing somebody's doubt that the person would

2. Needless to say, an ironic utterance may involve positively and negatively evaluative expressions that are truthful and are independent of the ironic untruthfulness and meaning reversal.

perform gracefully. If no such doubt is expressed, there is nothing to be evaluated negatively whether or not via irony given that the person referred to has been graceful (Garmendia 2015). It is then only the negatively evaluated doubt that renders the ironic utterance feasible. Therefore, what makes the irony work is the motivating negative evaluation, whilst “How clumsy” uttered without any doubt being previously cast on the quality of the evaluated performance does not come across as being a well-formed compliment paid by means of irony. In the type of irony that involves positive evaluation stemming from an overtly untruthful negative expression, the central implicit evaluation must concern a prior utterance expressing an opinion, belief, or expectation which the ironic speaker must mean to evaluate negatively. Examples found in the literature which do count as irony involve the negatively evaluative component as well, as shown above.

5. Final remarks

The fact that the kind of irony that involves an implicit positive evaluation communicated by dint of a negative expression does entail negative evaluation has already been mentioned in passing (Barbe 1995:21; Alba-Juez 1995) and discussed at length (Garmendia 2010, 2011, 2015; see also Dynel 2013b). This chapter has aimed to provide further evidence in support of the view that it is only negatively evaluative implicature that is a definitional component of irony.

It is noteworthy that none of the examples of irony proper found in the literature conveys solely a positively evaluative implicature. Purely positive evaluation carried by an overtly untruthful negative expression with no other negatively evaluated referent is tantamount to an overtly untruthful humorous utterance, but not irony. Grice (1989b[1978]:54) makes this clear: “I can for example say *What a scoundrel you are!* when I am well disposed toward you, but to say that will be playful, not ironical, and will be inappropriate unless there is some shadow of justification for a straightforward application—for example you have done something which some people (though not I) might frown upon.” What Grice appears to have meant under a “playful” utterance is lack of truthfulness orientated towards amusement, such as playful teasing, which must be distinguished from irony (see Dynel 2013a, 2014). Interestingly, given the proviso that Grice adds, it also becomes clear that the speaker’s dissociation from (and echo of) other people’s opinions does not suffice as the definitional hallmark of irony (see also Roguska 2007; Garmendia 2013, 2015).

The two evaluative implicatures arising in some cases of ironic utterances are interdependent but distinct, which is why the speaker may evaluate one referent positively, while also alluding to another referent and (more) implicitly criticise it.

The two referents may share one responsible individual or they may be distinct. In the classic poor grade example, the praise of the hearer's achievement in an exam is conveyed *in tandem* with the criticism of the hearer's earlier self-deprecating attitude (Alba-Juez 1995). Here, the hearer is both the receiver of praise and the target of criticism. By contrast, in the faulty weather forecast example, namely "The weather is dreadful" said a day after the interlocutor insisted that it would be awful, the positively evaluated weather is a referent entirely distinct from the referent of the negative evaluation, namely the interlocutor's (the target's) belief aired the day before.

In terms of (im)politeness effects, it may be claimed that whilst the receiver (if this is a person and a listener to the ironic utterance) of the positive evaluation is intended to appreciate the speaker's politeness, the receiver of the negative evaluation may be exposed to politeness or impoliteness, as is the case with any irony. As suggested at the beginning, whether irony invites politeness (e.g. involving a humorous reaction or mitigation of the criticism) or impoliteness (e.g. involving disparagement or augmentation of criticism) depends on several contextual factors and the form of an ironic utterance.

The positive evaluation communicated in the intermediate implicature may seem to be, at a glance, the central one for it entails overt untruthfulness and meaning reversal of the evaluative expression. The positive implicature does act as a springboard for the central negatively evaluative implicature of the ironic referent, but it is tangential to the central negative evaluation that irony communicates. The heart of irony is this further implicated critical evaluation of the antecedent. In a nutshell, even though both positive and negative evaluations co-construct this special type of irony, it is the negative evaluation that motivates its use. Thus, the authors who argue that positive irony is possible are "distracted by some apparently positive fact in the context, they fail to see the negative attitude the speaker is actually expressing" (Garmendia 2015:56). These authors do not explicitly recognise the reason for communicating the positive evaluation by means of overtly untruthful negatively evaluative expressions. Needless to say, positive evaluation could be communicated in many different ways, some implicit and witty (which irony is frequently considered to be). Therefore, the underlying reason for the use of an overtly untruthful negatively evaluative expression is the communication of the negative evaluation of a distinct referent, the antecedent. This is the driving force of all irony, whilst any positive evaluation is only an optional addition, just like many other linguistic phenomena (e.g. hyperbole, meiosis, or metaphor) (Dynel 2016c) or sarcasm (Dynel 2016a, 2017a). The bottom line is that irony inherently communicates implicit negative evaluation; positively evaluative irony is a myth.

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Verbal irony, politeness... and three ironic types

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This paper critically examines Leech's (2014) view that verbal or conversational irony is subsumed by politeness considerations, and proposes a new, threefold account of verbal irony. Although Leech's pragmatic model of irony is inadequate as a whole, it highlights crucial aspects of irony relating to (im)politeness theory. I propose an alternative account of verbal irony that first recognizes two major types, *polar irony* and *impersonation irony*, which have been referred to in the literature under various denominations, including oppositional irony and echoic irony (Simpson 2011). In *polar irony*, a desirable state of affairs is evoked that is blatantly contradicted by facts; in *impersonation irony*, the speaker takes up someone else's viewpoint or an assumed identity to ridicule targets or victims of the irony. Building on Leech's observations, I argue that a last type should be added, *mock politeness irony*, noting that the three types of verbal irony can combine. In the course of the discussion I review psycholinguistic data, other conceptions of irony, and the connection between politeness, irony and banter.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to bring to close scrutiny Leech's claim that "conversational irony is functionally dependent on, and explained by, the theory of politeness" (2014: 232) and, by so doing, propose an account of verbal irony¹ that recognizes three main types and brings to light some of the connections between irony and (im)politeness. Irony has proved a challenging notion to pin down, as many scholars have observed. While literary critics and theorists readily acknowledge that the term is highly polysemous, or at least comes in many different forms (including dramatic irony and situational irony among others), many linguists

1. As verbal irony does not always occur in conversation, the term *verbal* is more fitting than "*conversational*."

have tried to provide unitary accounts of verbal irony, and psycholinguists have followed their lead in assuming that it is reducible to a single general phenomenon (on dramatic irony, see Chapter 6 in the present volume).

For Leech, conversational (i.e. verbal) irony is partly subsumed by considerations of (im)politeness: an ironic utterance purports to be polite, and at first sight appears to follow his Politeness Principle, but implies impoliteness or rudeness indirectly. In other words, verbal irony is mock politeness. I wish to point out the problems inherent in Leech's model (2014) and offer an alternative one. I will first present his view and the various theoretical problems it raises, before arguing that verbal irony is a complex phenomenon covering several pragmatic mechanisms, the most obvious being polar or contrastive irony, in which meaning points to a desirable state of affairs that sharply contrasts with the actual situation. Another general type, impersonation irony, requires the speaker to adopt someone else's point of view so as to pour scorn on or make fun of it. Lastly, I will consider the interrelation between politeness, irony – with a special focus on “genteel” irony – and banter, positing a third pragmatic mechanism, which I will call mock politeness irony as it involves an incongruous, disingenuous use of hyperpoliteness, thereby vindicating Leech's insight that (im)politeness and irony are deeply interconnected.

2. Leech's framework

In this section, I examine the characterisation of irony as mock politeness (and its relation to sarcasm). Next I look into the procedure Leech postulates and conclude with the triggers he mentions (understatement and attitude clash).

2.1 Mock politeness, irony and sarcasm

Leech's long-standing main claim with respect to irony is that it quintessentially relies on impoliteness dressing up as politeness. This is first stated in his *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983): “If you must cause offence, at least do it in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP [Principle of Politeness], but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.” (1983: 82) In a similar vein, as Leech notes (2014: 222, 232), Culpeper (1996) treats sarcasm or mock politeness as a broad category of impoliteness (see Chapter 5 in the present volume). His model mirrors Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness superstrategies:

1. *Bald on record impoliteness*
2. *Positive impoliteness* – the use of strategies to damage the addressee's positive face wants
3. *Negative impoliteness* – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants
4. *Sarcasm or mock politeness* – the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere
5. *Withhold politeness*
(as summarized in Leech 2014:222, from Culpeper 1996:356)

Sarcasm or mock politeness is understood to amount to an indirect impoliteness superstrategy in its own right, which is an inverted image of Brown and Levinson's (1987) off-record politeness. One difficulty with this conception, however, is that Brown and Levinson acknowledge that the off-record strategy, relying on indirection, may not be independent of the other two main superstrategies for conveying politeness, i.e. positive politeness and negative politeness: "We may have been in error to set up the three super-strategies, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record, as ranked unidimensionally to achieve mutual exclusivity"; "... the possibility that the off-record strategy is independent of, and co-occurrent with, the other two super-strategies is something which definitely requires close investigation." (Brown & Levinson 1987: 18, 21). Their politeness model, as revisited by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2002, 2005: 187-284), glosses over that strategy, as if it were superfluous or, more precisely, as if in the end indirectness led to either positive politeness or negative politeness (the latter being much more likely as indirectness tends to be expressive of some degree of reserve, a typical feature of negative politeness). So sarcasm or mock politeness may not amount to an independent impoliteness superstrategy. Leech (2014:232) explains:

[Even though] Culpeper (1996, 2005) treats sarcasm (a word he prefers in this context to irony) as a category of impoliteness, which, in terms of face attack, it is. However, because of the different interpretative mechanisms involved, I have found it convenient to treat irony, or mock politeness, separately.

For Leech, irony hinges on pragmatic mechanisms that rely on politeness considerations but also crucially involve indirectness, which he seeks to account for. He nonetheless remains fully committed to the view that irony is mock politeness or, to be more precise, indirectly conveyed impoliteness, masquerading as politeness.

The problem with this view is that verbal irony or sarcasm (in its current loose sense) and mock politeness are phenomena which ought to be clearly distinguished. Mock politeness can be defined as hyperpoliteness (paying more politeness than what is due in a given situation) with a sarcastic or ironic intention –

i.e. Kerbrat-Orecchioni's (2010:39–40) *polirudeness*, a portmanteau word that she prefers. To illustrate this notion, let us imagine a close female friend of X addressing him as *Doctor X* at a dinner party: she might thereby imply (somewhat impolitely) that he lectures others even when trying to have a normal conversation, whilst being overtly hyperpolite. Here is one of her examples for *polirudeness*, taken from a political debate between Sarkozy and Le Pen (20/11/2003: *Vingt minutes pour convaincre*):

(1) **Le Pen:** *Sir, you give me the impression...*

Sarkozy: *Good (\) evening, sir. [low fall]*

Le Pen: *Good evening. Good evening. I said good evening when I arrived. And well, you were included in my general good evening.*

(adapted and translated from the exchange reported by Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2010:46)

Yet *polirudeness* appears to exemplify just one of several specific ways of being ironic, as it consists in the disingenuous and perfidious use of politeness markers or strategies. Irony is a much broader category and therefore should not be conflated with mock politeness (or *polirudeness*).

As for the word sarcasm itself, in spite of present usage, which extends the notion to cover most if not all instances of irony, it is perhaps better to restrict its use, following Abrams (1999:136):

Sarcasm in common parlance is sometimes used as an equivalent for all forms of irony, but it is far more useful to restrict it only to the crude and taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise: "Oh, you're God's great gift to women, you are!" The difference in application of the two terms is indicated by the differences in their etymologies; whereas "irony" derives from "eiron," a "dissembler," "sarcasm" derives from the Greek verb "sarkazein," "to tear flesh."
(the emphasis is Abrams')

That taunting is foregrounded in sarcasm is a well-established fact (see Campbell & Katz 2012:459, and Dynel 2014:634). In the specific sense given by Abrams, sarcasm is also related to antiphrasis, by which one ostensibly says the opposite of what one ironically means.

2.2 Leech's pragmatic procedure

Now seems a fitting time to examine Leech's fuller and more recent definition, in which he lays out the pragmatic mechanisms he postulates (2014:233):

In order to be ironic, *S* expresses or implies a meaning (let's call it Meaning I) that associates a favourable value with what pertains to *O* (*O*=other person(s), mainly the addressee) or associates an unfavourable value with what pertains to *S* (*S*=self, speaker). At the same time, by means of Meaning I and the context, *S* more indirectly implies a second, deeper meaning (Meaning II) that cancels out Meaning I by associating an unfavourable value with what pertains to *O*, or associating a favourable meaning with what pertains to *S*. The derivation of Meaning II from Meaning I is by means of two paths of inference: first, Meaning I is infelicitous (i.e., pragmatically untenable in context, often because of violation of the Cooperative Principle) and therefore to be rejected; and second, given that the meaning is infelicitous and in accordance with the PP, the obvious way to make sense of it is to look for a related interpretation that is felicitous and not in accordance with the PP – which is what the Irony Principle provides.

Let us turn to (2) and (3) to illustrate the first part of the quotation and both favourable and unfavourable valuation:

- (2) [After an electoral speech greeted by wild applause]: *Well done, an amazing achievement. To talk so much rubbish in so short a time.*
(Martin 1992: 88)
- (3) *Since the author suffers from the not uncommon constitutional defect of being incapable of understanding Jung's writings...*
(Charles Rycroft's *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. ix, as quoted by Muecke 1982 [1970]: 59)

In (2), the apparent praise of the addressee is interpreted as a cutting taunt: the achievement is deemed to be appalling, despite the overtly expressed positive valuation. At first sight, in (3) the writer appears to be self-deprecating: he presents himself as suffering from a defect, which turns out not to be a defect at all since it is widely shared and so perfectly normal. As Leech observes, the favourable valuation (that is ironically upended) can pertain to any other person – and not necessarily the addressee – making the apparent utterance meaning qualify as an instance of third-person politeness, as opposed to bivalent politeness simply involving speaker and addressee(s) (Leech 2014: 8–11):

- (4) [Mrs Ferrars'] *complexion was sallow; and her features small, without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong characters of pride and ill nature.*
(Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Chapter 34, p. 162)²

2. The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Sense and Sensibility*, by Jane Austen (released 2008, updated 2013): <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/161/161-pdf.pdf?session_id=7abfe47c39581b325f55ea4b658f93611e8239f5> (August 2017).

The narrator seems to pay some deference to her character (“a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance”), to evince some sympathetic empathy, which is blatantly contradicted by the end of the utterance.

Sometimes, however, (speaker-oriented) unfavourable valuation or, more commonly, (addressee/third-person) favourable valuation fails to apply. In some cases, one could perhaps argue that the speaker pretends to value the general situation positively, as in (5), but in others like (6), no valuation whatsoever is conveyed and upturned.

(5) [After learning one’s car is beyond repair :] *Nice!*

(6) [Two farmers in a drought-stricken area. One says to the other:] *Don’t you just love a nice spring rain?*

(Attardo 2000:816)

Whether politeness is relevant to those instances appears extremely doubtful.

More generally speaking, in text-long ironies the narrator (not the author) may appear fully in earnest and highly polite, as in Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*, in which a painfully serious narrator offers to solve Ireland’s overpopulation problem by cannibalism. A narrator can also come across as straightforwardly critical or offensive towards an external group, as in Defoe’s self-explicit *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters*, without any surface politeness being cancelled and reversed. The narrator is still in either case understood to be polite or aggressive, in spite of being held up as a butt for irony and ridicule. In addition, for those extended, text-long ironies at least, it is notably difficult to reconstruct what Leech calls Meaning II. Swift is presumably imparting to his readers the idea that his narrator and the cannibalistic economy he advocates are ludicrous, and Defoe that executing all dissenters to solve the problem of religious dissent is not the best option available. Yet the derivation of such a minimal Meaning II from Meaning I seems to work along different lines than for obvious examples like (2) and (5), in which the speaker says the opposite of what he actually means – and still, what exactly this opposite is remains open for debate. Note moreover that in more genuine and subtle instances like (4) or (6), how Meaning II is obtained and what it consists of is also potentially fairly contentious.

In addition, *pace* Leech and those who, less cautious than him, follow Grice’s view of irony as a breach of truthfulness, ironic utterances can be both perfectly felicitous and true even when taken at face value:

(7) [a mother who sees her child’s room in a mess :] *I love children who keep their rooms clean.*

(Gibbs & O’Brien 1991)

- (8) I want to go for a picnic. My friend G does not. I convince him, and we drive out. It's very cloudy and windy out. My friend says, mockingly: "What a lovely day for a picnic!" By the time we get to our destination, the weather changes. It is now an extraordinarily beautiful day. I turn to my friend and say in a mocking tone: "What a lovely day for a picnic!"
(Ronnie Brosh, as quoted and emphasized in Giora, Fein, Ganzi et al. 2005: 98)

In (7) and (8), the surface or literal meaning conveyed by the ironical utterances is true or, at least, felicitous ("What a lovely day for a picnic" is arguably equivalent to 'It's a lovely day for a picnic'). In sum, Leech's account is too narrow to cover all ironies, besides being partly inadequate as it relies too heavily on (mock) politeness considerations and a rather simplistic assumption about ironic meaning derivation.

2.3 Leech's triggers

It may be argued that Leech's account is too broad as well. It is debatable whether irony is present in some of the examples he adduces for his conversational irony triggers: understatement and attitude clash. Partington (2007: 1550) observes that authors tend to take for granted that the examples they provide (often made up or selected) display irony on the sole basis of their own intuitions, which are not unlikely to be tampered with by theoretical preferences.

Let us start with understatement. Grice treats irony, and meiosis or understatement separately. Interestingly, the initial example in the quotation below, taken up by Leech from Grice (1989: 34), originally falls under the heading "meiosis":

"Of a man known to have broken up all, one says *He was a little intoxicated*." It is clear, from the fact that violence and intoxication are generally negatively evaluated, that the understatement puts a mild, polite gloss on something that was in actuality a far more serious offense.

(Leech 2014: 237)

The utterance may not be ironic, and understatement is perhaps not so much a trigger as a not uncommon correlate, just as hyperbole which can also be (and frequently is) used to convey irony (see, e.g., Carston & Wearing 2015). Nonetheless, Leech's analysis of understatement as a softener for the face-threat produced, not unlikely to elicit humour, is worth considering. One should add that this "softener" is often used disingenuously, giving rise to polirudeness or mock politeness, as in the following instances expressed with understatements:

- (9) [Of someone who was very drunk] *He was a little intoxicated*
(Wilson & Sperber 2012: 124)

- (10) [During a torrential thunderstorm] *It seems to be raining a bit.*
(Simpson 2011:38)
- (11) [A has accused B of being sulky or ill-humoured, and B replies:] *Well, you're not exactly a bundle of laughs yourself.*
(Leech 2014:237)
- (12) *Tim Henman is not the most charismatic player in the field*
(Wilson 2006:1722)

The combination of understatement and irony, although far from being systematic, plausibly implies a mocking polite use of meiosis.

The other trigger cited by Leech is attitude clash: “a case where the overt ‘polite’ meaning and the ‘impolite’ meaning occur side by side in the same piece of language.” (Leech 2014:238) But the utterances he puts forward (borrowed from Culpeper 2011, who calls them “verbal formula mismatches”) do not figure prominently in previous discussions of irony:

- (13) *Could you just fuck off?*
(Culpeper 2011:175)
- (14) *Dear Cretins...*
(Culpeper 2011:236)

Such examples certainly pertain to mock politeness, the speaker’s intention being to use offensive language to attack the hearer’s face, making an ironically hyperpolite conversational opening to achieve this goal. Whether (13) and (14) are ironic, and in which sense, is another matter resting on lexical intuition, which may be theory-driven.

In sum, although partly inadequate because too narrow (and too broad as well as it presumably fails to exclude some non-ironic occurrences), Leech’s model draws attention to several important aspects of verbal irony, and especially its connection with politeness and impoliteness.

3. How to define verbal irony?

I now propose to present other accounts of verbal irony whose primary focus is not on politeness. In this section I survey the various ways in which verbal irony has been theoretically approached (Section 3.1) and introduce two main mechanisms through which it can be conveyed: polar (or contrastive) irony (Section 3.2) and impersonation irony (Section 3.3), which sometimes combine.

3.1 Different approaches

Most characterisations of verbal irony in pragmatics have tried to reduce it to a single, one-dimensional phenomenon, providing either a set of necessary and sufficient conditions (e.g. Dynel 2014) or a unique pragmatic mechanism to account for it, albeit often distinguishing a variety of subcases (e.g. Sperber & Wilson 1978; Clark & Gerrig 1984; Giora 1995; Attardo 2000; Partington 2007; Leech 2014). Irony then tends to be presented as a matter of all-or-nothing, depending on the writer's sense of what is ironic. Some criticism has been repeatedly voiced against this approach among linguists (e.g. Utsumi 2000; Simpson 2011), and several psycholinguists have proposed that irony is best conceptualized within a constraint satisfaction model, without necessary and jointly sufficient conditions (Pexman 2008; Katz 2009; Campbell & Katz 2012). In this framework, various factors or significant correlates are argued to be critical in recognizing irony (for Campbell & Katz 2012: failed expectation, pragmatic insincerity, negative emotional attitude, and one or several identifiable victims; for Wilson 2013: a dissociative attitude, a normative bias, an ironical tone of voice).

Contrary to theoretical research, I argue that verbal irony is best conceived of as a lexical, polysemous category covering several general types, which correspond to distinct senses or lexical entries, and for which I postulate separate pragmatic mechanisms (that presumably apply more appropriately to clear cases). What speakers include within the reach of the word "ironic" is a lexicographer's question for which tests can be devised, and which remains to be investigated, following a procedure like the one proposed by Simpson (2015), for instance.

Two of its senses (lexical entries) are presumably correlated with the two main ways of defining irony in rhetoric, from Cicero onwards. Quintilian defined it either as a trope (one means the opposite of what one says) or as a figure of thought, in which the speaker takes up a specific stance or voice distinct from his (or her) own. Simpson (2011) respectively renames the two types oppositional irony and echoic irony, to which I prefer contrastive irony and impersonation irony. I believe those terms better reflect the way they work, as described in the next two sections. I also wish to avoid using the theoretically-loaded word of "echoic", as relevance theorists (following Sperber & Wilson 1978) have always taken the view that verbal irony as a whole is quintessentially echoic.³

3. One of the main problems with the notion that all ironies are echoic and imply a dissociative attitude by the speaker is that the definition is too broad. If I quote the words of someone I disapprove of with disgust, I can very well be in earnest and not necessarily ironical (Simonin 2006: 34).

3.2 Contrastive irony

The first way of defining irony hinges on the view that an ironical utterance expresses a desirable state of affairs (SoA henceforth) that is blatantly contradicted by the actual SoA (Cutler 1974; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Giora 1995), a type I have called polar irony (2006: 37), when “the ironical utterance evokes a desirable state of affairs that stands in sharp contrast with what the speaker assumes to be mutually manifest knowledge of the actual state of affairs”. This fairly directly accounts for (2), (4) and (5), reproduced below as (15), (16) and (17):

- (15) [After an electoral speech greeted by wild applause]: *Well done, an amazing achievement. To talk so much rubbish in so short a time.*
- (16) ... *a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her [Mrs Ferrars'] countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong characters of pride and ill nature.*
- (17) [After learning one's car is beyond repair:]: *Nice!*

An amazing achievement, a really becoming facial expression for Mrs Ferrars, and nice news would have been desirable, instead of what is actually the case in the examples considered. (6) and (7) evoke the relevant SoA more indirectly, but they rely on the same principle. (6) and (7) are reproduced as (18) and (19), to which I add (20), an ironic utterance that works along similar lines:

- (18) [Two farmers in a drought-stricken area. One says to the other:]: *Don't you just love a nice spring rain?*
- (19) [a mother who sees her child's room in a mess :] *I love children who keep their rooms clean.*
- (20) *Our friends are always there when they need us.*
(Martin 1992: 81)

(18) and (19) evoke the desirable states of affairs that correspond to the propositions ‘There is a nice spring rain’ and ‘You keep your rooms clean’, which are first automatically considered in this context, before being ruled out for interpretative purposes. (20) is bound to remind hearers of the saying “A true friend is always there for you” or one of its variants, which are blatantly contradicted by the literal meaning of (20) and the situation in which it is uttered.⁴

4. I would argue the same underlying mechanism is at work in some instances of Partington's phrasal irony, by which a phrase is understood to generate automatically a negative or positive expectation that is immediately contradicted by other elements in the utterance, as in *those suspicious of the recent outbreak of love between Blair and Brown, and [...] the British government actively discouraged attempts to assassinate Adolf Hitler on the ground that he was making*

Polar irony obviously fails to account for all verbal ironies, but it is correlated by interesting psycholinguistic evidence. Giora's work tends to show that interpreting antiphrastic utterances normally takes longer than processing literal equivalents (see also Schwoebel et al. 2000; Ivanko & Pexman 2003; Kaakinen et al. 2014), and that subjects usually first activate literal meanings before ironic ones become available, at which point the representation of literal meaning does not start to decay but remains as active as when first activated (Fein et al. 2015; Giora 1995; Giora et al. 1998; Giora & Fein 1999a, 1999b; Giora et al. 2007). Sometimes, however, ironic utterances do not take longer to process than their non-ironic counterparts (Gibbs 1986; Gibbs 2002; Katz 2005; Pexman 2008; Kowatch et al. 2013), because ironic interpretation may be facilitated by cues (like context or intonation), or even be directly activated by some lexicalized ironic phrases or patterns (like "You're a big help") without the prior mental representation of literal meaning – which is nonetheless still activated initially as well (Fein et al. 2015). In any case, the mutual activation of ironical and literal meaning creates a sense of contrast, which is crucial to polar irony and makes it biting. And as has been repeatedly observed, the greater the contrast, the more effective the utterance in terms of interpersonal impact (Colston & O'Brien 2000a, 2000b; Toplak & Katz 2000; Colston 2002), and the easier to detect the irony (Gerrig & Goldvarg 2000; Giora, Federman et al. 2005; Pexman et al. 2000, Ivanko & Pexman 2003), even though other factors may interfere, like the suitability of the face-threat effected by irony (Pexman et al. 2010).

Taking for granted the importance of contrast for this type of irony, I will now link it with ironic understatements. For that purpose, it is necessary to classify polar irony as a subcategory of *contrastive irony*, the more general type for which the contrast holding between the desirable SoA and the actual situation does not need to be too sharp and involve polar opposites. The situation explicitly wished for is then not the most desirable one that can be imagined. Indeed, for statements to be understood as ironic, they do not need to refer to polar opposites, nor does the situation need to be the exact opposite of the literal meaning (Cori et al. 2016). Let me take up examples (9) to (12):

- (21) [Of someone who was very drunk] *He was a little intoxicated*
(Wilson & Sperber 2012: 124)

such a good job of losing the war (as quoted in Partington 2011:1791, 1794). With negative expectations, my account of contrastive irony would have to be further broadened to cover such utterances as well, even though they may display wit, humour and a sharp sense of contrast. Only with positive expectations do we find clear instances of polar (or simply contrastive) irony, as the relevant phrase conjures up a positive assumption (desirable SoA) that is conspicuously contradicted by the situation represented by the whole utterance.

- (22) [During a torrential thunderstorm] *It seems to be raining a bit.*
- (23) [A has accused B of being sulky or ill-humoured, and B replies:] *Well, you're not exactly a bundle of laughs yourself.*
- (24) *Tim Henman is not the most charismatic player in the field.*

In ironic understatements the desirable SoA is what hearers would normally associate with the literal meaning of the utterance, which would be a lesser evil. As previously suggested (1.3.), the speaker's apparently reticent use of irony may in fact pertain to mock politeness, and so contribute to making the utterance even more humorous. Under the cloak of minimizing disapproval of a third person, as in (21) and (24), the addressee (22) or the general situation (23), the speaker condemns the latter pointedly and all the more effectively as the biting edge comes unexpectedly, being hedged with (overly) conspicuous politeness.⁵

Interestingly, in negative sentences like (23) and (24) the irony can be truly polar if the hearer mentally entertains a positive representation for them ('You're a bundle of laughs'; 'Henman is the most charismatic player in the field'). Another difference worth noting is that (23) and (24) are meant as literally true in a strict sense, while the literal meaning in (21) and (22) is genuinely understated. Giora and colleagues (Giora, Drucker et al. 2015; Giora, Givoni et al. 2015; Giora 2016) have recently and intriguingly shown that ironies expressed with negation turn out to be quicker to process than their literally critical (or positively ironical) counterparts, which they ascribe to a default, favoured ironical interpretation. Polar ironies expressed with negation are a (sub)class of their own.

3.3 Impersonation irony

The second type involves an element of pretence that is often found in occurrences of verbal irony (Clark & Gerrig 1984; Perrin 1996; Currie 2006). Here speakers take up a voice that is not their own and which represents a limited perspective or other shortcomings that are mocked:

Impersonation irony: the speaker assumes the identity of a persona, and draws attention to the ludicrous aspects that are apparent in the message ostensibly conveyed by that persona, in order to ridicule in a manner deemed to be gratifying the persona and/or whoever/whatever it might stand for.

5. Similarly Veale observes that the hedge *about as* facilitates a humorous, ironic interpretation in utterances involving incongruous similes like *He is about as tough as a marshmallow cardigan* (2013: 16). The desirable state of affairs is 'being tough' here, and the phrase *about as* conveys some kind of reticence on the speaker's part and the mocking use of politeness presumably brings an additional touch of humour, just as the incongruity of the simile.

Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and Defoe's *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters* are cases in point. But this type is not limited to text-long ironies. Example (8) provides another instance ("What a lovely day for a picnic"), in which the addressee's previous opinion is mockingly adopted and echoed. This type of irony may also rely on a word or a phrase, through the narrative device of focalization, as in (25) or (26):

- (25) [in *Candide*, Pangloss, the philosophical mentor of the eponymous protagonist, an enthusiastic champion of Leibnitz's conviction that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, has contracted a venereal disease; Candide, failing to recognize him at first, offers him money to go through a cure] *Pangloss, in the course of his treatment, lost no more than one eye and one ear.* (Voltaire's *Candide*, Chapter 4, p. 25)⁶
- (26) [a renegade works his way into friendship with an innocent and worthy Jew for the purpose of robbing him] *The stroke of genius in his evil-doing is that he himself was the informer who denounced his good friend the Jew to the Inquisition, which seized him that morning and made a bonfire of him a few days later. Such is the way the renegade came to peacefully enjoy the wealth of the accursed descendant of those who crucified the Lord.* (Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, as quoted by Muecke 1969: 18)

In (25), Pangloss's viewpoint comes through in the use of the phrase *no more than one...*, which shows how absurd his unconditional optimism can be. In (26), the perspective of the inquisitors and perhaps the renegade as well can be perceived in the choices of the adjective *peacefully* (*enjoy*) and the noun phrase *accursed descendants of those who crucified the Lord*. In addition, *peacefully* (*enjoy*) seems to be twice loaded with irony, as it suggests (implicates) that the renegade righteously enjoyed the Jew's wealth. This positively valued SoA naturally is at loggerheads with the actual situation, and impersonation irony is then compounded with contrastive (polar here, more specifically) irony. The same cannot be said for *accursed*, erroneously describing the worthy Jew, as the epithet does not designate a desirable trait.

The combination of polar irony and impersonation irony is a topic that deserves a more thorough investigation than can be given here. Although utterances in which both types occur may not necessarily be felt to be more ironic than if contrastive irony only were present (see Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989), the double load may result in increased efficiency. To take a trivial example, if I say "Lovely weather" during a torrential downpour, the irony could become somewhat biting

6. My own translation of "Pangloss dans la cure ne perdit qu'un œil et une oreille" (Voltaire 1869 [1759]).

if I echo someone who has predicted fair weather for that occasion – and they would then be targeted as an irony victim. This possibility raises new research questions and avenues that – I would like to suggest – are worth exploring.

4. Politeness, irony and banter

The two types that I have just characterized need to be complemented by a third one to obtain a fully adequate model of verbal irony and replace Leech's (and others') accounts. I will describe mock politeness irony in the next section before I round off the discussion with considerations on the so-called "genteel irony" category and banter, which Leech opposes to irony. (see Chapter 8 in the present volume).

4.1 A third type of verbal irony

In reviewing Leech's conception of irony as mock politeness (Section 2), I argued that instances of the latter do not necessarily involve irony and, in particular, I suggested that attitude clashes (*Could you just fuck off; Dear Cretins...*) may fall beyond its semantic reach. In fact, ironic mock politeness can be equated with polirudeness: hyperpoliteness with a sarcastic or ironic intention, consisting in the disingenuous, perfidious use of politeness markers and strategies, which could potentially ground a working definition for an additional type of irony. Note however that this characterization includes the words *sarcastic* and *ironic*, and as a result cannot be used to distinguish another category of verbal irony without some circularity. In addition, I wish to show that part of the irony in polirudeness can sometimes be attributed to contrastive irony.

Let us return to examples of polirudeness, starting with (1), which includes the ironic utterance reproduced here as (27):

(27) **Sarkozy:** *Good (\) evening, sir.* [low fall]

The insistence on the polite greeting draws attention to the fact that the addressee has failed to produce a similar polite greeting, in contrast to the speaker, reminding everyone of the norm 'You should say good evening at this time of day when starting a conversation'. Contrastive irony underlies (27) as a counterfactual, desirable SoA is evoked (Sarkozy's opponent greeting him) that stands in sharp contrast with the current situation at this stage of the conversation. The question is whether all instances of polirudeness relate to contrastive irony in the same manner. Some, like (28) and (29), obviously do:

(28) [To somebody who hasn't helped at all] *Thank you for your help.*

(29) *Please don't mind me.*

The counterfactual SoA is conjured up directly (through the noun phrase *your help*) in (28), and in (29) through the presupposed '*You are minding me*'. In this utterance there might be an additional polar component, in so far as the politeness marker *please* encourages hearers to interpret the request as expressing a desirable SoA, which is at loggerheads with what the speaker has in mind. In any case, there are also instances of polirudeness that do not fit the contrastive irony type.

First consider (3), now (30):

(30) *Since the author suffers from the not uncommon constitutional defect of being incapable of understanding Jung's writings...*

(30) relies on disingenuous modesty, to the apparent benefit of another writer (Jung), as the author pretends to lack intellectual power to interpret Jung. In a sense he is adopting a distorted perspective on the actual situation. There is an inconsistency between the modest way in which he belittles himself and his statement that not understanding Jung is a fairly usual occurrence: the latter's writings are inferred to be arcane, and the initial apology (a negative politeness strategy) creates an incongruous sense of contrast between what is meant literally and what is implicated and understood in the end. Here the victim is Jung and not some persona whose identity is assumed by the speaker, as in impersonation irony.

I would like to suggest that the same mechanism is at work for ironic understatements, and specifically for those that do not evoke a desirable state of affairs through negation (and so do not pertain to polar irony). The utterances *He was a little intoxicated* (of someone who was very drunk) and *It seems to be raining a bit* (when it is pouring) hinge on apparently mitigated disapproval: the speaker seems to try to minimize disapproval of a third person (through reticence) or of the general situation and its impact on hearer(s) and speaker alike (through optimism). There is a discrepancy between the polite stance adopted by the speaker and the spin given to events, and the actual situation. The irony springs once again from an incongruous gap between the actual SoA and an explicitly communicated representation of it, which expresses polirudeness at the same time. Addressees can be directly targeted by this type:

(31) **Lady Astor:** *If you were my husband, I'd poison your tea.*

Churchill: *Madam, if you were my wife, I'd drink it!*

This specific example rests on double meaning. The politeness strategy that Churchill is deceptively employing is to seek agreement, suggesting the ludicrous scenario that he might drink poisoned tea to please Lady Astor were she his wife,

while obviously meaning that under the circumstances he would do so to escape life with her.

This leads me to a proposal for defining the third type, naturally conveyed through *polirudeness*. In *polirudeness* irony, the ironical utterance literally expresses a somewhat distorted or inadequate perspective on the relevant situation due to the (hyper)politeness overtly but disingenuously paid, creating an incongruous sense of contrast between the speaker's adopted stance and how she actually evaluates the situation.⁷

Polirudeness irony is akin to contrastive irony in so far as it draws on the notion of contrast (which does not apply to the same entities). They may overlap, as in understatements for which negative forms are used, or in (27), (28) and (29). The third type of irony could also be wielded by a ludicrous persona brought to existence for the sake of impersonation irony. The first case of overlap is presumably the more frequent. It is illustrated by (4) as well: while Jane Austen's narrator resorts to contrastive irony, some concern is initially expressed towards Mrs Ferrars, but as readers come to realize that the commiseration is not genuine, the fictional character becomes the butt of mock politeness irony too.

4.2 “Genteel irony” and banter

The third type of verbal irony – as well as the other two – fails to cover examples that involve praise by apparent blame or, more generally, impoliteness, like (32):

- (32) [Kyoko learns that her husband Jiro has fudged his travelling expenses and bought her a nice present. She says to him:] Kyoko (appreciatively): *You're so naughty.*
(Hamamoto 1998:263)

This occurrence of “genteel” (as opposed to “biting”) irony illustrates banter, which Leech characterizes as mock impoliteness (2014:238). Yet (32) differs from Leech's illustrations of banter which do not appear to display any irony, albeit genteel. Even though I would opt for excluding “genteel irony” from the ironic domain because it lacks the bitingness or mocking component that is so essential to the notion of irony (and hence distinguishes it from so-called “ironic praise”), it is obvious that the pragmatic functioning of (32) is reminiscent of *polirudeness* irony and contrastive irony. Firstly, the mirror image of *polirudeness* irony is found in (32): the utterance literally expresses a somewhat distorted or inadequate

7. The sense of contrast is created between the speaker's adopted stance and the actual SoA, and not between two contradictory terms or phrases expressive of a speaker's stance, as in (13) and (14)

perspective on the relevant situation due to the impoliteness overtly but disingenuously conveyed, creating an incongruous sense of contrast between the speaker's adopted stance and how she actually evaluates the situation. Secondly, Kyoko's appreciating tone as well as the situation makes manifest the assumption 'You are very kind and considerate' – the (polar) opposite of the propositional meaning conveyed literally. Nonetheless it is the desirable SoA that corresponds to the actual situation (as perceived by the speaker), while the literal meaning expresses a sharply contrasting view through an inadequate descriptive choice for the SoA.

In any event, "genteel irony" differs from its biting counterpart in significant respects. Psycholinguistic research has consistently pinpointed that they are clearly asymmetrical (Anolli et al. 2000; Hancock et al. 2000; Pexman & Olineck 2002; Pexman & Zvaigzne 2004; Pexman et al. 2005). One interesting experimental question concerning politeness and mocking or biting irony is whether ironical utterances imply more or less politeness than their literal counterparts. While Dews and Winner (1995) propose that criticism is tinged with positivity or muted when employing irony (see also Dews et al. 1995, 1996), Colston (1997) argues that it is made more biting by resorting to irony. The psycholinguistic evidence is still partly inconclusive (Matthews et al. 2006: 21). We may also wonder whether genteel banter contributes to making a compliment more or less polite.

Banter relates to positive politeness and acts as a social accelerator increasing intimacy. Brown and Levinson (1987: 229) mention "conventionalized (ritualized) insults as a mechanism for stressing solidarity." It is just as if speakers pretended that their bonds were so deep that they could afford to be offensive and vent their aggressive impulses without hurting supportive addressees that belong to the same in-group. Taking up Leech's conflation of banter with mock impoliteness, subsuming "genteel irony" under the general concept turns out to be a fully justifiable classificatory choice.

Leech suggests that banter can exploit irony, but not the other way round, and that: "mock sarcasm can occur only when the ironic remark is a conventionalized, semi-idiomatized routine: that is, when... the irony has become the default interpretation" (2014: 242). This can be readily explained in the framework postulated here by the indirectness of the three verbal ironies, which can only be overcome by the conventional use of ironic (and especially sarcastic) phrases so that they can be employed for another indirect procedure involving politeness: banter. And yet it should be added that impersonation irony can be superimposed on genteel banter, as suggested for (32). Banter can also be drawn on, let's say, in a parody featuring speakers that practice it. Ritualized or not, it is a potential resource for impersonation irony.

5. Conclusion

Even though verbal irony as a whole is not functionally dependent on, nor can be explained by, a theory of politeness, Leech's claim is stimulating and shines light on mock politeness (or polirudeness) as irony, as well as on the various connections between politeness and irony. It has led me to revisit my own conception of verbal irony and postulate a third type, *polirudeness irony*, which makes it possible to account for cases not covered by *contrastive irony* and *impersonation irony*. Polirudeness irony is likely to co-occur with the other two types – and contrastive irony in particular (4.1) – just as these two may overlap in some instances, making utterances potentially more humorous and ironically effective. The fact that polirudeness can be deemed ironical on its own is evidence for an additional lexical development for *irony* (i.e. a new entry), which enshrines the importance (in terms of relative frequency if not centrality) of polirudeness in the use of irony. I would like to conclude with the prediction that examining instances of each type of irony separately, tracing their processing routes, documenting their psychological effects and correlates, establishing conditions and degrees of felicity bearing on each – as well as accounting for occurrences of verbal irony falling under several types – will provide promising avenues for future research.

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Irony and semantic prosody revisited

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This chapter explores Louw's (1993) claim that deviation from conventionalised semantic prosodies can be indicative of irony. Taking account of criticisms of the concept of semantic prosody, I analyse a short extract from a sketch from the 1960 satirical revue *Beyond the Fringe*. I argue that the satire in the sketch derives in part from the projected irony and that semantic prosody can be a useful tool in uncovering this. However, I argue that to fully reveal the source of the ironic effects, it is necessary to utilise a more nuanced approach to semantic prosody, as well as to consider how semantic prosodies clash with each other, and how concepts such as semantic preference and Gricean implicature act as further triggers of irony.

1. Introduction

In 1961, the comedian Peter Cook opened a nightclub in London which became famous for comedy that satirised the British establishment. With no small amount of irony, Cook called it The Establishment. The comedian's reputation as a leading satirist had been cemented the previous year with the premiere of *Beyond The Fringe*, the stage revue that Cook, along with his fellow comedians Alan Bennett, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore, had written and starred in. *Beyond the Fringe* quickly became famous for its no-holds-barred approach to the objects of Cook and his fellow performers' satire. No-one up to that point had so obviously lampooned authority figures such as the Royal Family and the Prime Minister of the day in so public a domain.

In this chapter I analyse an extract from one particular sketch from *Beyond The Fringe*, "Aftermyth of war". The sketch satirises the British establishment's attitude to the Second World War. In particular, I analyse the projection of irony in the sketch, focusing on one particular utterance. In so doing I employ the concept of semantic prosody, first posited by Louw (1993), who suggests that deviation from conventional semantic prosodies can act as a trigger for irony. Semantic prosody has not been without its criticisms (see, for instance, Whitsitt 2005; Hunston 2007; and Stewart 2010), and so I first review some of the issues

that have been raised with the concept before going on to apply it analytically. In my analysis, I follow Simpson's (2011) core definition of verbal irony as being 'the perception of a conceptual paradox, planned or unplanned, between two dimensions of the same discursive event' (Simpson 2011: 39). Simpson (2011) notes that this core definition incorporates two sub-definitions, which he explains as follows:

Sub-definition 1: Irony is a perceived conceptual space between what is asserted and what is meant

Sub-definition 2: Irony is a perceived mismatch between aspects of encyclopaedic knowledge and situational knowledge (with respect to a particular discursive event)

(Simpson 2011: 39)

My analysis of a short extract from "Aftermyth of war" aims to test whether the concept of semantic prosody is able to account for and explain the ironic effects that the sketch as a whole projects. I then consider what light my analysis might shed on the concept of semantic prosody.

2. Semantic prosody

2.1 Semantic prosody and irony

In a groundbreaking paper, Louw (1993) introduces the concept of *semantic prosody*.¹ The term, he explains, is analogous with the phonological phenomenon identified by Firth (see Palmer 1968), whereby certain phonological characteristics can transcend segmental boundaries (Louw 1993: 158). Louw gives the example of the word *Amen*, arguing that the vowels in this word take on a nasal quality because of their proximity to the nasal consonants /m/ and /n/. Louw (1993) suggests that a similar phenomenon can occur with regard to the transfer, or spread, of meaning between words in close proximity to one another. In explaining this phenomenon, he draws on the concept of collocation (that is, the tendency of words to co-occur). To illustrate what he means, he refers to the final line of Philip Larkin's poem 'First Sight', which is concerned with the experiences of new born lambs in winter. The poem concludes with the claim that these lambs have no capacity to grasp what lies in store for them as the year progresses, and that what is to come will be "Utterly unlike the snow". Louw argues that this final line, and the word *utterly* in particular, is suggestive of "the myriad cruelties of the world

1. Although the term *semantic prosody* was first used in print by Louw (1993), he attributes the term to John Sinclair (see Louw & Milojkovic 2016: Chapter 1).

the lambs have just entered” (1993:161). This is on the grounds that the habitual collocates of the word *utterly* are overwhelmingly negative. Louw cites evidence from the original 18m word COBUILD corpus, in which the collocates to the right of *utterly* include *demolished, destroyed, meaningless, stupid, terrified* and so on. There are very few semantically positive collocates. On the basis of having observed this pattern, Louw argues that *utterly* takes on the semantic meaning of its overwhelmingly negative collocates, causing us to interpret the final line of Larkin’s poem as meaning that nothing good is in store for the lambs.² (Louw’s implication here is that the negative semantic prosody in question belongs to the word *utterly*; this is a point of contention in other conceptualisations of semantic prosody and I explore this in more detail in Section 2.2).

What, then, of the collocates of *utterly* that are not semantically negative? There are just four in Louw’s (1993) original concordance and Louw explains that these four instances are foregrounded because they break the established pattern. Moreover, the functional effect of this foregrounding is irony; when something semantically positive follows *utterly*, we cannot take it at face value because we are so used to the normal pattern of negativity. For instance, one of Louw’s (1993: 164) examples is a description of someone as “confident, well-trained and utterly dedicated”; the wider context reveals that person to be a Nazi Stormtrooper. (Louw also points out that a recognition of insincerity on the part of the writer may also be a functional effect of deviant semantic prosodies). Louw’s definition of irony maps on to Simpson’s (2011: 39), in which he claims that irony arises when we perceive a difference between ‘what is asserted and what is meant’. Arguably, though, the concept of semantic prosody offers an additional mechanism for identifying irony, since a straightforward opposition between what is said and what is meant does not necessarily result in ironic effects (consider, for instance, the issue of violating the Gricean Maxim of Quality [Grice 1975] for reasons of politeness).

Louw’s (1993) discussion of semantic prosody has been influential in both corpus linguistics and stylistics, and its potential value for the purposes of identifying verbal irony should be clear. However, neither the concept nor the associated methods are uncontroversial, as the following section explains.

2. Louw’s interpretation of the poem is at odds with some of those by other critics and, indeed, ordinary (i.e. non-academic) readers, as a quick Google search will reveal. It is important to point out that the use of semantic prosody in the justification of a particular textual interpretation does not in and of itself invalidate other interpretations of a text. It does mean, though, that those other interpretations would need to be evidenced through other methods, if not via semantic prosody.

2.2 Semantic prosody as one aspect of extended units of meaning

Semantic prosody is a consequence of collocation, the tendency of words to co-occur. Of course, words co-occur all the time in language but of particular interest to linguists are high-frequency collocates. Collocates are those words that appear within a particular span (or ‘window’) of the node or target word. Four words to the left and right of the node word is a typically used span, though Mason (1999) points out that not all words influence their environment in the same way. Mason argues for the use of variable spans as a result. While collocational behaviour can be assessed purely by reference to the frequency of collocates (as in Louw 1993), it is more reliable to calculate the statistical significance of collocates. This is because simple frequency is not necessarily indicative of collocational strength. A collocate which co-occurs with the node word much more frequently than it does with other words will be a stronger collocate than one which frequently co-occurs with lots of other words in addition to the node. Collocational strength can be tested by calculating an MI (mutual information) score. Scores of 3 and above are indicative of strong collocation.³ Claims for semantic prosody, then, need at least to be based on the statistical significance of collocates. Moreover, as Stubbs (2007) explains, semantic prosody (which he prefers to call *discourse prosody*, the reasons for which will be discussed below) is a pragmatic feature and needs to be seen as just one element of the structure of an extended unit of meaning. Stubbs’s (2007: 179) model of such a structure is based on Sinclair’s (1998), which is made up of four elements, collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody, and explained by Sinclair as follows:

Collocation (at present) is the co-occurrence of words with no more than four intervening words.

[...]

Colligation is the co-occurrence of grammatical phenomena.

(Sinclair 1998: 15)

3. A further reason for statistical testing is that any word will collocate more often with high frequency words in a language than it will with low frequency ones. Statistical testing addresses this issue by introducing a weighting calculation. One problem with the MI test, however, is that it does not work well with words of low frequency, which can end up with deceptively high MI scores. For this reason, MI tests are often used in conjunction with T-tests. A range of other tests are available, such as z-score (Berry Roghe 1973), log-likelihood (Dunning 1993), MI3 (Oakes 1998) and log-log (Kilgarrif & Tugwell 2001). See Hunston (2002) and Baker (2006) for fuller discussions of the purpose of alternative tests.

Semantic preference is the restriction of regular co-occurrence to items which share a semantic feature, for example that they are all about, say, sport or suffering.

[...]

The semantic prosody of an item is the reason why it is chosen, over and above the semantic preferences that also characterise it.

(Sinclair 1998:20)

As an example, consider the collocates of the phrasal verb *get away with* in Table 1, below. *Get away with* collocates with nouns such as *anything*, *murder* and *crimes*. Its colligational preference is for modal structures (e.g. *can*, *could*) and it has a semantic preference for being preceded by words from the semantic field of ability (e.g. *allowed*, *able*, *letting*, *managed*, *lets*). But what of its semantic prosody? It is not obviously positive or negative, and might best be described as one of censure or disapproval; but this would seem to be dependent on the viewpoint of the speaker or writer (I discuss this issue further, below).

This is a problematic issue that Hunston (2007) identifies with Louw's (1993) conception of semantic prosody. So too do Morley and Partington (2007:140) when they state that "semantic prosody can give the reader or listener an insight into the opinions and beliefs of the text producer" (see also Partington 2004). In addition, Hunston (2007) identifies a number of other issues with the concept of semantic prosody.

First, she argues, in line with Sinclair (2004:37), that semantic prosodies are distinguishing characteristics of extended units of meaning rather than properties of individual words (the word, rather, is the core of a longer sequence of co-occurring items). To illustrate this point, Hunston (2007) refers to the word *persistent*, arguing that its semantic prosody varies according to the particular unit of meaning of which it is a part. By way of example, she points out that when *persistent* is followed by a noun phrase (e.g. "*persistent* drug users", "*persistent* errors"), the semantic prosody is negative. However, when *persistent* is used predicatively (as in the examples "Con men and charlatans are so thick and so *persistent*", "But she is so *persistent* that Beth – that they end up – they have a real break, a very good conversation") it has the capacity to generate both negative (as in the first example) and positive (as in the second) semantic prosodies.

Hunston (2007) makes two further, and related, points about semantic prosody: (i) that a binary approach, wherein semantic prosodies are either positive or negative, would seem to be an over-simplification of how attitudinal meaning works (2007:256); and (ii) that semantic prosodies are likely to vary according to the point of view of the reader. To explore these issues further, we need to consider the distinction between semantic prosody and semantic preference.

Table 1. Collocates of *get away with* in the BNC
(9-word window; minimum frequency of 3)

	Collocate	Freq	All	%	MI
1	with	660	650940	0.10	4.22
2	get	654	94823	0.69	6.99
3	can	137	229823	0.06	3.46
4	could	79	158325	0.05	3.20
5	let	68	33038	0.21	5.25
6	anything	25	27172	0.09	4.08
7	murder	22	5434	0.40	6.22
8	allowed	21	12207	0.17	4.99
9	wo	16	15312	0.10	4.27
10	able	16	29454	0.05	3.32
11	lucky	11	3872	0.28	5.71
12	letting	8	2158	0.37	6.09
13	managed	5	7238	0.07	3.67
14	em	4	1949	0.21	5.24
15	killers	3	370	0.81	7.22
16	behaving	3	589	0.51	6.55
17	lets	3	847	0.35	6.03
18	treating	3	1305	0.23	5.40
19	crimes	3	1688	0.18	5.03
20	hopefully	3	1824	0.16	4.92

2.3 Semantic prosody versus semantic preference

Hunston (2007:266) points out that the term “semantic prosody” is often used to refer to two different phenomena: the first is the discourse function of a unit of meaning and the second is the attitudinal meaning of words or phrases. Using the term to refer to what are in actual fact two distinct concepts is likely to give rise to confusion and so Hunston (2007:266) favours two different terms. She explains that her preference is to retain the term “semantic prosody” to refer to the discourse function of a unit meaning. This is in line with Sinclair’s own use of the term. To refer to the propensity of a lexical item to frequently co-occur with items that express particular evaluative meanings, Hunston (2007:266) prefers the term “semantic preference” or “attitudinal preference”.

To explore the difference between semantic prosody and semantic preference, we can consider the two lexical items *job* and *career*. Table 2 shows the first 15 adjectival collocates of the node word *job* in the BNC (British National Corpus) of 100m words of British English.

Table 2. First 15 adjectival collocates of *job* in the BNC (9-word window) in order of collocational strength

	Collocate	Frequency	All	%	MI
11	off-farm	15	80	18.75	6.69
12	well-paid	13	77	16.88	6.54
15	unenviable	8	85	9.41	5.69
1	full-time	108	2158	5	4.78
2	part-time	77	2046	3.76	4.37
6	thorough	28	1081	2.59	3.83
10	vacant	16	785	2.04	3.49
4	marvellous	32	1746	1.83	3.33
5	decent	30	1724	1.74	3.26
8	worthwhile	24	1435	1.67	3.2
3	temporary	61	3740	1.63	3.16
7	boring	25	1632	1.53	3.07
9	fantastic	17	1113	1.53	3.07
13	hardest	9	587	1.53	3.07
14	terrific	9	618	1.46	3

These can be compared with the first 15 collocates for *career* in the same corpus, shown in Table 3.

Stubbs (2007: 178) explains that by examining collocates, we can identify the semantic preference of the node word; that is, the lexical field(s) from which its collocates are drawn. For example, Tables 2 and 3 indicate that jobs and careers are both discussed in terms of workload (*full-time*, *part-time*), desirability (*unenviable*, *varied*) and industry (*musical*, *managerial*, *off-farm*). However, the semantic prosody arising from the units of meaning in which the two words are used is arguably different, in that the strongest collocates (i.e. MI 5+) of *career* are more positively evaluative than those of *job*, which are either negatively evaluative or purely descriptive. And while *job* does attract semantically positive collocates, those of *career* arguably have higher-status association (e.g. *distinguished*, *glittering*). According to Sinclair (1998), semantic preference describes the lexical relationship between the node word and its collocates (from which it is possible to derive the lexical field that Stubbs 2007:178 describes), while semantic

Table 3. First 15 adjectival collocates of *career* in the BNC (9-word window) in order of collocational strength

	Collocate	Frequency	All	%	MI
3	distinguished	79	2452	3.22	5.70
12	glittering	17	610	2.79	5.49
7	promising	28	1492	1.88	4.92
4	academic	69	4762	1.45	4.54
15	managerial	15	1329	1.13	4.18
6	racing	32	3173	1.01	4.02
1	successful	105	10564	0.99	4.00
5	entire	43	4633	0.93	3.90
10	varied	22	2829	0.78	3.65
2	professional	83	10842	0.77	3.62
14	full-time	16	2158	0.74	3.58
9	brilliant	24	3332	0.72	3.53
8	acting	27	4638	0.58	3.23
13	musical	17	2934	0.58	3.22
11	subsequent	22	4334	0.51	3.03

prosody describes the discourse function of the unit of meaning. Sinclair explains that semantic prosody conveys “a subtle element of attitudinal, often pragmatic meaning” (1998:20) and that “[t]he semantic prosody of an item is the reason why it is chosen, over and above the semantic preferences that also characterise it” (1998:20). To return to the example of jobs and careers, a career might be seen as something to aspire to more than a job because of the more strongly positive semantic prosody associated with the units of meaning in which *career* turns up. These reasons might well determine which word is chosen by a writer; for instance, it is possible to imagine that graduate recruitment agencies might well favour the term *career* over *job* for the reasons described above.

Semantic prosody is defined by Louw (2000) as “a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates” (Louw 2000:57). This is consistent with Sinclair’s, Stubbs’s and Hunston’s definitions but it is easy to see how it might lead to confusion and the running together of semantic prosody and semantic preference, since it makes no clear reference to the fact that semantic prosodies belong to units of meaning and not to individual words.

Sinclair (1998) and Stubbs (2007), who prefers the term discourse prosody to semantic prosody, both use the concept of semantic prosody in their accounts of the structure of units of meaning. What Louw (1993) does is to take the concept and apply it to account for the projection of irony in texts. One of Louw's (1993) now well-known examples of how, in his view, semantic prosody can give rise to irony comes from David Lodge's (1984) satire on academic conferences, the novel *Small World*. The extract that Louw (1993: 164) quotes is as follows:

The modern conference resembles the pilgrimage of medieval Christendom in that it allows the participants to indulge themselves in all the pleasures and diversions of travel while appearing to be austere bent on self-improvement.
(Lodge 1984: prologue)

Louw (1993) argues that *bent on* generates an ironic effect as a result of its semantic prosody. He cites the evidence in the concordance in Figure 1 to support his argument, stating that 'Although the corpus rises only to a modest total of ten citations for *bent on*, the seven cited below are sufficiently negative to suggest the consistency of background that Lodge needed in order to create the desired effect' (Louw 1993: 165):

```

1 them were so bent on defending themselves and on distinguishin
2 ment is hell bent on destroying British Leyland, aided and abe
3 side, seemed bent on getting down my collar and up the trouser
4 of the crowd bent on harrying the speakers, often for a laugh
5 nt. They are bent on 'improving' and perfecting existing weapo
6 n or persons bent on mayhem had not so far chosen to resort to
7 ated figure, bent on the same routine. Thereafter every Mamous

```

Figure 1. Collocates of *bent on* in the 18m word COBUILD corpus identified by Louw (1993: 165) as semantically negative

There are a number of issues worth pointing out with Louw's claims. The first is that he appears to run together the notions of semantic prosody and semantic preference, to the extent that it is difficult to know whether he views semantic prosody as a property of words or as a feature of units of meaning (in the case of his *utterly* example, it would appear to be the former, since he states that "*utterly* has an overwhelmingly 'bad' prosody" [Louw 1993: 160]). The second is that it is debatable whether Louw's interpretation of the semantic value of the collocates of *bent on* would be shared by all readers. This relates to Hunston's (2007) point about semantic prosodies being likely to vary according to a reader's perspective. We can see this if we consider the concordance in Figure 1. With regard to line 1, for example, it is not clear why 'bent on defending themselves' should be evaluated negatively. At the very least, more context is needed to determine the subject

of the verb phrase and what they are defending themselves against. Being *bent on* defending one's legal rights, for instance, would be more likely to be interpreted as a positive move than being *bent on* defending oneself after, say, having said something clearly racist or sexist.

Given the problems of just ten examples from the 18m word COBUILD corpus, Louw then turns to the larger 37m word corpus. Here he finds 103 examples of *bent on* and argues that these reveal a clearer profile of the negative semantic prosody of the phrase. Louw cites every third instance and asserts that "This concordance shows that the pursuits that people are *bent on* are almost always negative or unpleasant in some way" (Louw 1993:166). There are two issues here. The first is that we do not have access to the full concordance, only every third line, so it is impossible to know whether the unseen lines might falsify Louw's claim. The second is that Louw says that the semantic prosody of *bent on* is 'almost always' negative. This, of course, is not a precise account of the frequency of a negative profile; more importantly, without precise numbers, Louw's assertion is, once more, not open to falsification.

These criticisms aside, Louw's claim is that in those instances where *bent on* is used with semantically positive collocates (usually, he says, invoked by the collocate immediately to the right of *bent on*), the 'normal' semantic prosody is transferred. This results in the projection of irony since there is a clash between the semantically positive nature of the collocate and the transferred semantic prosody which is negative; in effect, there is, in Simpson's (2011) terms, a clash between what is asserted and what is meant.

Louw's discussion of the concept of semantic prosody has undoubtedly been influential in both corpus linguistics and stylistics, and the above criticisms should not be seen to detract from the value of his initial work in this area. Certainly, his research provides a working hypothesis for how irony is generated in texts. But it would seem to be the case that the concept of semantic prosody is improved (that is, made more specific and reliable) by separating it out from the concept of semantic preference. Consequently, this distinction needs to be considered in any analysis of irony that draws on Louw's approach. Furthermore, the reliability of a semantic profile is increased by the use of statistical tests of collocational strength. And the notion that semantic prosodies are either positive or negative would seem to be something of an oversimplification. Louw himself, in his discussion of the *bent on* example, refers to the concordance lines as being "sufficiently negative" (1993:164), suggesting that negativity is not an all or nothing quality. With these issues in mind, in the next section I explore the possible projection of irony in a short extract from the "Aftermyth of war" sketch described in Section 1. Following Sinclair (1998), Stubbs (2007) and Hunston (2007), I take semantic prosody to

refer to the discourse function of a unit of meaning and semantic preference to refer to collocational patterns.

3. Irony in “Aftermyth of war”

“Aftermyth of war” is a sketch from the stage revue show *Beyond the Fringe* that satirises British attitudes to the Second World War. In it, a narrator explains to the audience Britain’s role in the war and summarises various key events, such as the Battle of Britain. The other performers act out short scenes which illustrate the narrator’s main points. As with all the other sketches in *Beyond the Fringe*, “Aftermyth of war” was performed with minimal scenery, with the performers dressed in non-descript clothing (white shirt, grey trousers and grey sweater), augmented only occasionally with more obvious elements of costume (e.g. hats). Towards the end of the sketch, Alan (Bennett) enters and summarises very quickly how the war ended:

Alan: But the tide was turning, the wicket was drying out. It was deuce – advantage Great Britain. Then America and Russia asked if they could join in, and the whole thing turned into a free-for-all. And so, unavoidably, came peace, putting an end to organised war as we knew it.

(Bennett et al. 1987:78)

If we return to Simpson’s (2011:39) sub-definition of irony as ‘a perceived mismatch between aspects of encyclopaedic knowledge and situational knowledge (with respect to a particular discursive event)’, what is being satirised in the sketch is the irony of the people charged with winning the war not really wanting to win it because, actually, they’re rather enjoying it. The question, then, is how is this irony projected textually and how are readers likely to recognise this?

We can first note that Alan implicates that the end of the war was a bad thing. This is conveyed in his statement, ‘so, unavoidably, came peace’. *Unavoidably* has a semantic preference for negative collocates, as can be seen in the concordance in Figure 2.

What the concordance suggests is that processes described using the adverb *unavoidably* are usually negative in the sense of being unwelcome or undesirable to the speaker or writer (e.g. *unavoidably delayed*, *unavoidably detained*, *unavoidably distorted*, *unavoidably contaminated*). *Peace*, then, is an unusual collocate of *unavoidably*. Furthermore, the statement that “so, unavoidably, came peace” generates a conversational implicature (Grice 1975) as a result of flouting the Maxim of Manner. This is because *unavoidably* clashes collocationally with descriptions of peace coming, since the norm is only to use this adverb to describe attitudinally

look at things that we would like to do, and set our priorities. **unavoidably**, we have to delay some decisions, we put off other decisions, we their previous occupant, may have had something to do with it as well. **unavoidably** detained in a traffic snarl-up in Park End Street, Dennis couldn't be with as soon as she got back to the hotel. The Rome-bound train had been **unavoidably** delayed in Montreux after a small avalanche had blocked the track five miles further up stammered out his compliments and made the speech he had prepared about Don Joo being **unavoidably** detained in Lisbon by pressing affairs of state. Sara turned to her father, there, directly in her way, **unavoidable**, smiling passively, uncomfortably, yet **unavoidably**, was Lady Henrietta, dutifully offering herself for an exchange with her hostess. responsibilities in his life, and certain involvements, but those business obligations which do **unavoidably** devolve upon him he has always observed punctiliously. There are money matters voice over saving premature babies has its costs. weeks on a life support machine **unavoidably** damaged Jade's lungs. She's wholly dependant for breath on the oxygen bottle still matters. For the rest of Europe this assertion of German nationhood has its **unavoidably** bitter dimension. Britain has spent the last 100 years fighting against the facts of The Emergency Medical Rescue units that the city maintains to deal with such accidents were **unavoidably** delayed in getting to the scene, four out of five of their rescue vehicles are considering the scope and shape of a common foreign policy -- and therefore, **unavoidably**, common defence and security policies as well. Not all Americans enjoy what they and the propane/butane fuel mix makes it suitable for colder seasons. At present the **unavoidably** large cartridge makes life complicated for backpackers trying to limit their fuel load to what study tool for the committed student or collector of Caro, but its presentation is **unavoidably** prosaic: one misses the nuance and audacity of Caro if his works are reproduced on our children; that they are becoming even more radical than we and are **unavoidably** so. One of the teachers was saying that you give children pieces of paper thought too cheeky a dig at Marshall and Celestion. Though many assembly jobs are **unavoidably** labour intensive, computers and automation are a vital part of the neovay philosophy, officials box and those standing behind the speaker's chair should not be shown except **unavoidably** as part of wide-angle shots; # (b) shots which show the However, it can not be proved or disproved in any final way and is **unavoidably** a political statement. None the less, it is necessary to make explicit what between the CPS, the police and the courts. In the formative stages, **unavoidably** perhaps, relationships were tense and difficult, with a great deal at stake in the fact that in this case the point of law has not been served but **unavoidably** deserved. If we pretend there can be law when it is not clear what included in the treatment sessions. The therapist will otherwise receive a one-sided and often **unavoidably** distorted view of the relationship, and it is less likely that worthwhile change will It is difficult to define the absolute composition of fasting gastric juice since it is **unavoidably** contaminated by saliva, and often bile and pancreatic juice, and because mucus may . The cap that happened to get overlooked returns the reader's gaze blankly yet **unavoidably**, like the bill from a restaurant abroad which the conspirators find when they turn the overwhelming majority of recruits to the best jobs at the airport are recruited, **unavoidably** it seems, outside Shelland (as yet the Shelland workforce does not have the conceive of it in piecemeal fashion, recognising particular boundaries as and when it is **unavoidably** necessary to do so. It is not therefore assumed that people have a' the light of co-existing initiatives, boundary definitions and the fact that any assessment is **unavoidably** interim. Despite these complications this assessment of the MC experience will focus treated without doubting the historical part of this book.) The treatment will be **unavoidably** brief. It should serve the purpose, however, of providing a sense or free trade unions,' autonomous publishing houses' and so forth. All of this **unavoidably** suggested that the central question in the debates now under way in the country , and discusses the similarities between them and other critical practices. Psychological knowledge is **unavoidably** ambiguous, and this is especially clear when it involves relatively ill-defi explained ultimately in terms of our impairment, which qualifies us for admission to an **unavoidably** disadvantaged category of people. # Material abnormality # For all its deficiencies, the Times, even if it were possible, unless perhaps they were crises which might **unavoidably** lead to the person becoming trapped into a highly stressful lifestyle. Perhaps, for were treated by those present at the death-bed and recorded for the benefit of those **unavoidably** absent. For the dying man to lapse into a state of stupor or incoherence . However in order to cling with grim determination to the ancient beliefs which quite **unavoidably** preceded intelligent religious thought, religious leaders have refused to accept the fact. coercion to achieve, can be most effective. Nevertheless, the training is sometimes **unavoidably** accompanied by the infliction of punishment in some form or other, but as is have already been mentioned. There might have been more of these. ITV was **unavoidably** vulnerable to the impact of economic recessions upon advertising revenue (for instance, revenue is shipped on board of a man-of-war he becomes as insignificant as a midshipman must **unavoidably** be from his humble situation. I see the error' -- yet I can not endeavoured to coordinate activities through an underground body called the Communist Group. Progress was **unavoidably** slow but they set up and directed most of the subversive organisations. The crown -- to consult his parliament, the meeting of which on this occasion was **unavoidably** delayed, thereafter the tribune was only paid to grass the wheels of Anglo-saxal diplomacy thought too cheeky a dig at Marshall and Celestion. Though many assembly jobs are **unavoidably** labour intensive, computers and automation are a vital part of the neovay philosophy. between four people, which is much more difficult for the speaker/reader. If, **unavoidably**, three people are involved in conversation, it will help if the seating arrangements over the community even more and if the club was reduced to eight she would **unavoidably** become dominant. accepting that a group of countries should proceed to a political or a conscious thematic culmination of everything he had done before, but also represented, **unavoidably**, a kind of conclusion. This was confirmed by Tunnell of Love, a indicate one choice from the candidates listed. # 12. # where any Member is **unavoidably** absent from the House on that day, through sickness or by being abroad, the Party outside Parliament would be outraged; the Sovereign would be seen, however **unavoidably**, to be taking sides. And there would be no solution in appointing a would speak on behalf of the parents. This was not easy, and they **unavoidably** sounded like lawyers arguing a case. Gordon Sloan, the Interim Reporter, took # do come home at the agreed time; if you're going to be **unavoidably** late, ring your babysitter and let her know. # do make sure you a small number of portable machines, to be booked out to staff who must **unavoidably** work away from base for periods. Schedule: Inventory end 1992/93 Replacements 8 p.a. ALONE ON A DATE # How do you share a date when your paramour is **unavoidably** detained on business in another town halfway across the country? Microsoft Corp chairman Bill answer is that it never can -- at least, not completely. Multimedia is **unavoidably** a complex, technical environment and many design and application matters necessarily involve an understanding the spread of affluence, and the sheer rapidity of change, have combined, **unavoidably** to undermine the complex of institutions and myths that invested all pre-industrial civilisations with and your fingers are releasing the aromatic oils into the atmosphere, tranquillity and contentment **unavoidably** seep into one's outlook. # Site and soil # However, it does . From the outside, however, like many post-industrial conversions, the prospect is **unavoidably** prosaic. Porters South is a former three-storey beer-bottling plant, built in brick and when it is not starting back. If we look eyes with it are **unavoidably** intimidating it, when this is the last thing we wish to do. By degrees deflection and with tight radii and mountable shoulders; speed control islands to interrupt **unavoidably** long and straight stretches of road where speeds would otherwise be excessive; tough heather and naked peat hags, keeping to the cliffsides where possible but often **unavoidably** descending into and scrambling out of the coves and gullies that break the ramparts, economists to calculate returns on investment in education are laden with many assumptions and are **unavoidably** narrow in approach; in particular, the financial return is calculated on the basis mouth every day or so he, beyond a certain threshold of exhaustion, falls **unavoidably** asleep, bolt upright, with his eyes wide open. One of them admittedly asked of all other employees, at all levels, around the world.' **Unavoidably**, there will be further job losses -- around 250 -- in the UK and across the vital role that quinea pigs' perform and although the date clashes **unavoidably** with the A.G.M. we hope that some class-members will be willing to channel their efforts numbers were smaller on this occasion, several of those who have come regularly had **unavoidably** to miss this one, and we numbered only 17 in all. The May

Figure 2. Concordance of *unavoidably* in the BNC

negative processes. Consequently, Alan's description of the coming of peace is a decidedly odd (and consequently unclear) way of expressing the situation. The resultant impicature is that Alan believes that had it been possible to avoid peace, this would have been the better course of action. This is discursively deviant (see Chapter 8 in the present volume). War is generally acknowledged to be an undesirable state, therefore putting an end to it should, in normal circumstances, be seen as something desirable. We can also note that the Maxim of Quality is broken here. Despite the fact that *peace* is the agent of the clause, the statement that peace came *unavoidably* cannot possibly be true (the state of affairs must have come about as a result of human intervention to some degree). Alan may, of course, be deluded, in which case he is infringing (Grice 1975) the maxim rather than flouting or violating it. At the discourse level of author addressing reader, however, the

statement is clearly a flout and the implicature likely to be a satirical comment on leaders not taking responsibility for their actions.

In addition to the Gricean implicatures, what is also unusual is the statement that peace put an end to “organised war”. This too generates a conversational implicature – that war is acceptable so long as it is organised. ‘Organised war’ seems intuitively to be another collocational clash and this again is something that can be investigated with recourse to corpus data. In the BNC, for instance, *war* appears as a collocate of *organised* only once, and in this one instance it appears *before* the word *organised*, in the following example:

When this war broke out organised Labour in this country lost the initiative[.]

Organised war, then, is clearly an unusual collocation and is, in stylistic terms, foregrounded as a result. By contrast, the most frequent statistically significant (i.e. with an MI score of 3+) post-modifying lexical collocate of *organised* is *crime*, which appears as a collocate of *organised* 61 times in 41 texts. If we could say by virtue of this association that *organised* has a negative semantic prosody, then this would explain why *organised war* is foregrounded; in effect, the negative semantic prosody of *organised crime* is being transferred to *organised war*. But this is too simplistic and reveals the problems with seeing semantic prosody as the property of a word rather than of a unit of meaning. Just below *crime*, for instance, with a frequency of 44 and an MI score of 3.37, is *Labour*. And what of the grammatical collocates of *organised* that are ranked higher than *crime*? Table 4 shows the first 20 collocates of *organised* in the BNC.

What we can note from observing the concordances for the above collocates is that *the*, *by* and *a* are always collocates of *organised* as a verb. *And*, *in*, *for*, *on*, *with*, *as*, *at*, *into*, *which*, *an*, *around*, *local*, *groups*, *way* and *national* appear as collocates of both the verb and adjective *organised*. *Organised*, then, colligates with determiners, prepositions, nouns and adjectives, and it appears to have a semantic preference for nouns that specify co-operatives or collectives of some kind (e.g. *Labour*, *groups*, *council*, *society*, *party*). None of this explains where the intuited negative semantic prosody comes from. To explain this, we need to discern the pattern which predicts semantically negative collocates of *organised*. My initial view was that this was as follows, where square brackets indicate necessary components and round brackets indicate optional ones:

[lack of determiner] *organised* [as an adjective]
(+adjective) + [uncountable noun]

Based on the above observations, this particular pattern would seem to be the unit of meaning that carries a negative semantic prosody. Examples from the

Table 4. Top 20 collocates of *organised* in the BNC (4 word span to the right)

Rank	Collocate	Freq.	All	%	MI
1	the	1209	5973437	0.02	0.33
2	by	1187	505413	0.23	3.87
3	and	558	2587880	0.02	0.42
4	a	437	2136923	0.02	0.35
5	in	369	1914216	0.02	0.26
6	for	202	867618	0.02	0.53
7	on	116	717612	0.02	0.01
8	with	115	650940	0.02	0.14
9	as	108	646387	0.02	0.06
10	at	87	516591	0.02	0.07
11	into	86	155829	0.06	1.78
12	which	65	361506	0.02	0.16
13	crime	61	6815	0.90	5.80
14	an	61	333044	0.02	0.19
15	labour	44	26519	0.17	3.37
16	around	44	42775	0.10	2.68
17	local	40	45552	0.09	2.45
18	groups	36	18961	0.19	3.56
19	way	35	94797	0.04	1.20
20	national	34	36716	0.09	2.53

BNC that support this idea include *organised crime*, *organised chaos*, *organised abuse*, *organised backlash*, *organised conspiracy*, *organised congregation*, *organised hooliganism*, *organised pressure*, *organised protest*, *organised terrorism*, *organised violence*, *organised disruption* and *organised cruelty*. This would explain why, for instance, such phrases as *organised religion*, say, give rise to semantically negative collocates while phrases such as *these organised highways*, *many organised elements* and *all organised groups* do not. However, a closer look at the results of a BNC search for this perceived unit of meaning reveals many semantically positive nouns attached to *organised*, for instance *organised football*, *organised antislavery*, *organised benevolence*, *organised cricket*, *organised theatre*, *organised education* and *organised charity*. Furthermore, some examples are neither obviously positive or negative, such as *organised labour*, *organised religion*, *organised resistance*, *organised system*, *organised campaign* and *organised operation* (though, as

Hunston (2007:255) notes, in some cases, semantic prosodies may vary according to the point of view of the reader; for instance, *organised resistance* may be viewed as having a positive prosody if the resistance is against something the reader perceives to be bad, such as occupation). It may be the case that a larger corpus of British English, such as the Bank of English, would give a more reliable picture of the relative frequencies of semantically positive, negative and neutral collocates associated with the unit of meaning proposed above. However, without access to such larger corpora, we can only observe that the structure of the proposed unit of meaning does not account for why *organised war* appears to have a negative semantic prosody. To fully explain the semantically negative connotations that the phrase *organised war* projects, we need also to consider how these are arguably heightened by the preceding idiom *putting an end to* and by the qualifier *as we knew it*.

up his bag and walk out, that it was he who was **putting an end to** things. He did not, however, show any signs of picking up well, enough was enough. There had to be some way of **putting an end to** his domineering activities. So he thought she was explosive, did he? years, moving water from the wet north to the dry south and **putting an end to** drought. # Otters could soon be making a comeback along the banks really look forward to.' But so much football on TV is **putting an end to** the Saturday afternoon tradition. The final issue has been moving Coronation Street forward to demolish and reconstruct all the existing buildings comprising the denised property without **putting an end to** the tenancy (Price v Esso Petroleum Co Ltd (1980) 255 EG the positive campaign going and decide when the critical moment should come for **putting an end to** the Coalition'. on 8 September, Churchill, hitherto a free trader the means under god of extirpating all error and prejudice, and of **putting an end to** all undue and usurped authority in the business of religion as well as of but an agreement amongst humanities scholars to develop IT applications generally and by **putting an end to** territorial squabbling over who owns what encoding, interpretative or processing from Talbot Square to Layton Cemetery was opened on June 19th 1902, **putting an end to** the horse buses which had served the inland routes since being banned from the as saying that the party was willing to co-operate with the army in **putting an end to** a " reign of terror " by its political rival, the Sind-based Mohajir Susumu Ishii, the late leader of the Inagawa-kai crime syndicate, in **putting an end to** a harassment campaign against Takeshita by an obscure right-wing group, Nihon Kominto. lines may continue, but the News International case gives legal grounds for **putting an end to** the banning of newspapers and magazines of whatever political persuasion. The irony of opportunity to criticise the government for the little interest it has shown in **putting an end to** the import of unauthorised pirate telephones, 3m of which are now in Spain which one observer suggested had been selected' for the express purpose of **putting an end to** chief Joseph and his band'. malaria was rife and by the following Jew passing through the town conveyed the body to London for burial, **putting an end to** a thirty-seven-year Oxbridge career during which time he had a virtual monopoly on Hebrew undisturbed — mulching is not intended as a boon to lazy gardening by **putting an end to** the need for hoeing, the cover has to be disturbed and scratched open They wrote to local factories and the authorities, enlisting their support in **putting an end to** the stream's pollution. The group received a grant of 300 from the

Figure 3. Concordance of *putting an end to* in the BNC

There are 290 occurrences of *put* an end to* in the BNC. Figure 3 shows the concordance for the 17 instances of *putting an end to*. What this overwhelmingly indicates is that we put an end to undesirable activities (e.g. *drought, domineering activities, usurped authority, squabbling*, etc.). This semantic preference means that *organised war* (as distinct from the unmarked form, *war*) is also likely to be interpreted as something undesirable. The foregrounding that comes about because of the unusual collocation means that *organised war* constitutes a marked form. Use of the marked form generates an implicature, via a flout of the Maxim of Quantity, that the unmarked form (*war*) is both undesirable *and* disorganised.

of the death knell of erm, (SP:HYKPSUNK) Yes. (SP:HYKPSUNK) barn policy as we knew it. And part of that barn policy even were it not worthy of extra foaming waves. This was truly paradise; it had to be savoured as we knew it short lived. The wind began to pick up strongly; dense grey clouds solar-powered loudspeaker. Probably # The walkman: an end to domestic intercourse as we knew it, or a handy educational tool for budding DIY types? who cares... friend the foreign secretary has made the point several times -- that yugoslavia as we knew it is no more, whether that is to be lamented or not, it what we are seeing then is an acknowledgement that the gallery system as we knew it early in the eighties, has really changed, up until now it's the sections for which you had a responsibility was very well done, as we knew it would be. And your readiness to assume additional tasks like the service in

Figure 4. Concordance of *as we knew it* in the BNC

We can now turn to the qualifier, *as we kn*w it*. This appears 148 times in the BNC, with six instances of *as we knew it* (see Figure 4). The second and final concordance lines record slightly different usages, with *as we knew it* preceding an ellipted non-finite verb phrase and a relative clause (*as we knew it short lived* and *as we knew it would be*, respectively) so can be discounted. The others all use *as we knew it* as part of a unit of meaning in which *as we knew it* qualifies a noun phrase. The collocates of this unit of meaning (i.e. NP + *as we knew it*) are in many cases semantically negative (e.g. *death knell*, *an end*, *no more*), but what is perhaps more significant is that all uses of *as we knew it* occur in contexts in which regret is expressed. This particular unit of meaning, then, generates a negative semantic prosody, specifically one of regret. This provides further evidence for an interpretation of *putting an end to organised war* as something regrettable. Indeed, this can also be seen as support for Hunston's (2007) claim that semantic prosodies go beyond being simply positive or negative. It may be the case, for instance, that it is possible to specify positive and negative prosodies to a greater level of detail than is usually done; in this case, the negative semantic prosody can be explained in more detail as a prosody of regret.

Having examined the semantic preferences and prosodies of the constituent parts of the utterance, 'So, unavoidably, came peace, putting an end to organised war as we knew it', we can now consider the likely triggers for irony.

- The semantic preferences of *unavoidably* signal that the speaker sees the coming of peace as regrettable (i.e. a negative state of affairs); this clashes with our values and assumptions about the world and we judge the speaker to be either non-serious, ridiculous or loathsome as a result.
- The semantic preferences of *putting an end to* lead us to expect that whatever has been ended (in this case, *organised war*) is something usually considered to be negative (which, of course, war is).
- However, the semantic preferences of *as we knew it* give rise to a semantic prosody of regret, implicating that the end of 'organised war' is something to be regretted. This suggests that *organised war* is actually considered by the speaker to be a good thing.
- The fact that *organised war* is considered by Alan to be a good thing lead us to infer, via a flout of the Maxim of Quantity (Grice 1975), that it is only the unmarked form (i.e. *war*) that is assumed to be *disorganised* and undesirable as a result.

Ultimately, then, *organised war* is considered by Alan to be a good thing (compared to the "free-for-all" that transpires once America and Russia join in). However, the irony of this position seems to arise not from the semantic prosody of the unit of meaning in which the noun phrase appears. Instead it arises because

of a clash between the conversational implicature arising from the phrase *organised war* and the semantic prosody of *as we knew it*. What this suggests about the detection of irony is that it is not simply a matter of comparing a semantic prosody against a norm. In this case, it is a matter of comparing the semantic prosody of a particular unit of meaning against an implicature arising from a specific phrase and discovering that the propositional assertions of the two positions are incongruous. This is broadly in line with Simpson's (2011: 39) assertion that verbal irony is "a perceived conceptual space between what is asserted and what is meant."

4. Conclusion

What I aim to have shown in this chapter is that semantic prosody can be used in the identification of irony in texts, but that (i) the concept needs to be separated out from the simple concept of semantic preference and (ii) semantic prosodies in and of themselves are not necessarily enough to explain the creation of irony. As suggested above, the irony generated by the line from "Aftermyth of war" arises from a complex interplay of stylistic effects. These include the semantic prosodies of *putting an end to* and *as we knew it*, and, particularly, the clash between the semantic prosody *as we knew it* and the pragmatic implicature arising from the phrase *organised war*. In addition, the Gricean implicatures generated by the flouts of the Maxims of Manner and Quality in relation to the use of the adverb *unavoidably*, work to convey the deviant mind style (Fowler 1977) of the character, which constitutes a further clash, this time between what the character Alan considers to be normal and what the reader is likely to believe. My analysis of semantic preferences and prosodies in the line in question can also be used to express more clearly the irony conveyed by the sketch as a whole. It is not that the characters are enjoying the war so much as the fact that they are enjoying the organisation of it. Indeed, the sporting metaphors in the extract analysed (e.g. 'the wicket was drying out', 'It was deuce – advantage Great Britain') suggest a conceptualisation of war as an organised game, with rules to be followed and fair play expected. One possible extrapolation from my analysis is that the satire as a whole is a comment on what is perceived by the writers as a British propensity for being more concerned with following correct processes than actually reaching the goals that those processes are intended to realise. (On satire, see Mandon in the present volume). The sketch may be seen as debunking some of the mythologizing of the Second World War by those who were lucky enough to survive it and who then carried some backward-looking and triumphalist attitudes over into the 1950s and 60s.

What my analysis suggests is that semantic prosody, while a useful tool in the identification of verbal irony, cannot be the sole locus of irony. Irony is depen-

dent on a clash of expectations, and this clash can happen at various linguistic levels in addition to syntax and semantics. My analysis, for instance, indicates the importance of conversational implicature. Furthermore, we can note that verbal irony is discursal in the sense that it is created over a longer stretch of text, so irony is unlikely to be identifiable in a single unit of meaning. Finally, my analysis and discussion of semantic prosody provides further evidence that a simple binary distinction between positive and negative prosodies seems unlikely. Indeed, it is possible to imagine the semantic prosody of a particular unit of meaning as having a more experiential semantic value; for example, censure, approbation or disgust. This might in turn suggest that whether we identify a unit of meaning as having semantic preferences or a semantic prosody could well depend on the stance or viewpoint of the reader. This points to the need for experimental testing of readers' responses to postulated semantic prosody. I would suggest that such an investigation, at the intersection of corpus linguistics and stylistics, would be a fruitful area for future research.

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PART II

**Irony and banter from 17th and 19th
century literature to contemporary
discourse**

Simulating ignorance

Irony and banter on Congreve's stage

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This study reflects the importance in staged discourse, of interpretation. It shows how in late seventeenth-century Restoration comedy, both verbal irony and banter rely on the simulation of ignorance in order to achieve a common satirical aim. By offering an opportunity to serve up evaluative comments which when taken literally are erroneous, ironic discourse and banter serve to expose a deviation from the norm. However, these discourse practices also serve to ridicule those who, by failing to detect the discrepancy between literal and intended meaning, fail to question those erroneous evaluations. Ultimately it appears that Congreve's satirical target is above all those who lack judgement, those who have impaired vision, what Currie (2006) has called "a defective view of the world".

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the workings of verbal irony and of banter in the four Restoration comedies which William Congreve wrote for the London stage in the last decade of the seventeenth century: *The Old Batchelour* (1693), *The Double-Dealer* (1694), *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700).¹ In his *Dictionary of the English Language* published in 1785, Samuel Johnson defines irony as "a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words" (Johnson 1785:1079). Johnson's definition still echoes some two hundred years later since Grice (1975) presents irony as a trope which flouts the Maxim of Quality and defines the intended meaning of an ironic utterance as "the contradictory of the one [the speaker] purports to be putting forward" (Grice 1975:53). Subsequent studies have convincingly shown, however, that ironic utterances do not necessarily involve the direct negation of literal meaning [see, for example, Sperber

1. All references to the comedies are from *The Complete Plays of William Congreve*, ed. H. Davis, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

& Wilson (1981) and, more recently, Giora (1995)]. Examples of straightforward oppositional irony involving the negation of literal meaning can be found in Congreve's comedies. From the examples of ironic discourse studied, however, it would appear that ironic meaning may often qualify literal meaning and not simply negate it. Verbal irony will therefore be taken as occurring when the intended meaning of an utterance differs from its literal meaning, creating what Simpson calls "the space between what is meant and what is asserted" (Simpson 2003:90).

It is perhaps because irony sometimes qualifies rather than inverts literal meaning that retrieving ironic or intended meaning requires a skill that not all on-stage addressees appear to possess. The reception of discourse on stage becomes a focal point in Congreve's comedies as attention is drawn towards the varying ability of the on-stage addressee(s) to decode that discourse. The audience delight in retrieving non-literal meaning, particularly when it is not retrieved on stage. This chapter considers the importance, in staged discourse, of interpretation, that is, of the perception (or non-perception) by the on-stage addressee of the discrepancy between what is said and what is intended.

Any analysis of staged discourse necessarily raises questions as to who is constructing the discourse and who is being addressed. In staged discourse, non-literal meaning may or may not be intended by the on-stage speaker. In all cases, any potential for non-literal meaning is determined by the intention of the dramatist: it is necessarily constructed by the creator of the discourse. As Grice (1978:124) states, "I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt". However, according to Ubersfeld (1996:188), theatrical dialogue implies a "twofold situation of communication" where two processes take place simultaneously: communication between character figures occurs within the wider frame of a communication process linking "scriptor" (dramatist) and audience. Therefore, the specificity of dramatic text cannot be overlooked. This explains why the audience may interpret utterances as having ironic meaning even when a stage character is not speaking ironically intentionally (and indeed lacks the knowledge or wit that would enable him to do so). What is said is intended to reflect what Grice calls a "hostile or derogatory judgement" – that of the dramatist. In the same way, non-literal meaning can only be said to exist if it is retrieved by at least the audience. It may be retrieved by both on-stage hearers and audience or by the audience alone. Also, on-stage hearers to whom the discourse is not addressed directly may or may not pick up a non-literal meaning that is not picked up by the direct addressee.

It is one of the conventions of comedy that untenable statements of the sort which become tenable when interpreted ironically are reserved for skilled speakers and this convention guides the audience in their interpretation of discourse.

However, in the dedication of his final comedy, *The Way of the World*, Congreve laments upon the inability of his audience to distinguish between a skilled and an unskilled speaker, those he defines as a “Truewit” and a “Witwoud”: “For this Play had been Acted two or three Days, before some of these hasty Judges cou’d find the leisure to distinguish betwixt the Character of a *Witwoud* and a *Truewit*” (Congreve 1700:390). Congreve’s *Truewits* excel at producing the most face-threatening² messages in the most overtly polite discourse, which is also the most heavily laced with irony.³

In this chapter, it will be argued that it is not only the varying ability to produce coded discourse that divides and defines the characters. The ability to decode utterances, to detect a discrepancy between literal meaning and intended meaning, to flag up an affirmation as untenable also divides and defines. Generally, those targeted by irony and banter are ridiculous characters. When such characters fail to detect a discrepancy between literal and intended meaning, this failure reinforces their ridiculous status since it entails a failure to notice that an affirmation is untenable, that is to see that literal meaning is not valid or not possible or simply not plausible. Failure to detect that a proposition is inadequate may stem from a deficiency of knowledge: characters from outside the microcosm of London society who are not familiar with its codes serve to illustrate this (see Miss Prue, the country-girl in *Love for Love*). More commonly, the failure reflects an inability to *relate* what is being apparently affirmed to what one knows about aesthetic or moral norms. It can be suggested that this incompetence highlights that of the contemporary audience whom Congreve found to be lacking in the ability to distinguish true wit and to interpret discourse as it was intended.

Interestingly, on Congreve’s stage, it is when an addressee fails to identify non-literal meaning but nevertheless suspects that “something more” is being said that he voices a fear that some banter may be afoot. The term “banter” occurs in the text and the characters denounce the practice. If he does detect the presence of a discrepancy between literal and intended meaning, the addressee flags up the discrepancy indignantly. There are three dialogues in Congreve’s plays in which the term “banter” occurs, all of them in *Love for Love* (1695) (on the definition of ‘banter’, see Chapter 8 in the present volume). As will be shown, seventeenth-century “banter” is not the discursive practice relying on mock impoliteness and causing mock offence that was first defined by Leech in

2. The term “face” is used here in line with the concept developed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

3. The art of using politeness to dress up face-threatening content was the focus of a previous paper entitled “Polite company”?: Offensive Discourse in William Congreve’s Comedies (see Mandon 2013).

his “Banter Principle” (Leech 1983:144).⁴ On Congreve’s stage, it is a practice that often causes not mock but true offence.⁵ In the text of Congreve’s seventeenth-century dialogues, “banter” is used as a transitive verb that appears to be synonymous with our modern-day “tease” although, where identified, it causes offence.⁶ This tallies with Samuel Johnson’s definition according to which “to banter” is “To play upon; to rally; to turn to ridicule; to ridicule”. Interestingly, Johnson’s synonyms reflect varying degrees of negativity. “To play upon” is surely less hostile than “to ridicule”. The noun “banter” has a narrower definition: “Ridicule; raillery”. The dictionary also includes “banterer”, one who banters (Johnson 1785:218).

As will be shown, detecting the presence of something more than apparent meaning and *a fortiori* retrieving intended meaning require some skill. It is all the more difficult as a speaker whose discourse carries a non-literal meaning will always pretend that this is not the case. Pretence is mentioned briefly by Grice who stipulates: “To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretense to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretense would spoil the effect” (Grice 1978:125). Pretence is later given greater attention by Clark and Gerrig (1984). On Congreve’s stage, both irony and banter, as we shall see, involve the simulation of ignorance by the speaker. This study therefore highlights the importance of pretence for such discursive strategies, reminding us that the term irony comes from the Greek word *eirōn*. In Greek comedy, the *eirōn* was a dissembler, one who feigned ignorance in a discussion in order to lead his interlocutor to expose his own stupidity. Like the *eirōn*, Congreve’s ironists and his banterers [sic] feign ignorance or simulate an error of judgement in order to expose the failings of their target who is often their direct addressee (on the concept of ‘eirōn’, see Chapter 7 in the present volume).

2. Irony and banter in satire

Congreve’s ironists and banterers share a common purpose in that they operate in the service of satire: making an evaluative statement which they pretend to

4. “In order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to *h* ... What *s* says is impolite to *h* and it is clearly untrue. Therefore what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true”. (Leech 1983:144).

5. See for example *Love for Love* (1695) where Sir Sampson resorts to threats of physical violence to put a stop to it: “Speak to be understood, and tell me in Plain Terms what the matter is with him, or I’ll crack your Fools Skull” (4. 1. 135–136).

6. Teasing is defined by Keltner et al. (2001:234) as “intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on something relevant to the target.”

believe, they simulate an error of judgement in order to draw attention to the flaws or failings of their target (who may or may not be their direct addressee). When skilled speakers offer untenable utterances, the audience know that those speakers are pretending to believe what they say, that their error of judgement is simulated, that their sincerity and their ignorance are feigned. To identify the untenable and to determine whether a non-literal meaning is indeed possible, the audience may rely on immediately visible evidence, or on information they have gathered from previous scenes. But importantly, the audience also rely on external background knowledge and on their understanding of norms and expectations shared by the fictional and non-fictional worlds. Congreve's four comedies are comedies of manners and as such, satirize contemporary society. His characters are constantly assessing and defining the world and especially the people around them, commenting on what they see, and relating it to the aesthetic, social or moral norms shared by the world of the play and that of the seventeenth-century audience. The elements commented on belong to the world of the play but are generally manifestations of phenomena existing beyond that world. Marriage, for example, is always harshly satirized in Restoration comedy. Congreve's first comedy, written and first performed in 1693, is no exception. In *The Old Batchelour*, Belinda observes that the newly married Heartwell is particularly doleful. This is clear to all from his participation earlier in the scene and his simultaneous presence on stage. His ill-humour inspires a comment from Belinda on a universal characteristic of married men: "Ha, ha, ha, O Gad, Men grow such Clowns when they are married" (5. 2. 25–26). Here, the presence on stage of the grumpy newly-wed is instrumental in making literal meaning untenable and in leading the hearer to a non-literal meaning which is tenable. In this instance, the non-intended meaning is ironic, and easily retrieved through the direct negation of the literal: men do not become clowns once married. It may be noted that the theatre offers the unique possibility of showing and telling simultaneously: an example of a universal phenomenon is visible at the same time as that phenomenon is verbally defined and therefore the discrepancy is instantly detected. Here, there is a blatant discrepancy between what is seemingly posited (i.e. that married men become clowns) and the demeanour of the married man present. Without the presence of Heartwell on stage, the utterance would not necessarily be understood ironically even though its literal meaning might well be questioned.

In the two cases that follow, the discrepancy between literal and intended meaning is blatantly obvious to the audience. In *Love for Love* (1695), Jeremy, the witty servant, calls Tattle "so Accomplish'd a Gentleman" (5. 1. 205) when in fact Tattle is defined in the list of characters as "a half-witted Beau" and has indeed proven to be exactly that throughout the play. In *The Way of the World* (1700), Mrs. Marwood comments on the nonsensical arguing of Petulant and Witwoud.

Once the inebriated pair have displayed their inaptitude, she assesses their discussion by saying “I perceive your Debates are of Importance and very learnedly handld” (3. 1. 412–413). The audience readily perceive the criticism conveyed ironically in these utterances. Tattle’s accomplishments go no further than tittle-tattle and gossip-mongering, as has been shown in the two previous acts. The two men’s dialogue is a parody of the verbal jousting demonstrated by the True-wits. As was the case for Belinda’s evaluation of married men, the non-literal or intended meaning of the utterances is reached through a direct inversion of the literal. These are good examples of sarcasm, a type of irony that Abrams has defined as “the crude and taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise” (Abrams 1957:99). They also constitute “banter”, as defined by Samuel Johnson, since Tattle, Petulant and Witwoud are effectively ridiculed. The purpose of such additions to the dialogue is twofold: they enhance the comic dimension of what is commented on since as evaluative comments, the utterances make a focal point of the elements worthy of ridicule. More importantly, because they function ironically, they simultaneously evoke a norm or expectation and the manifestation of a deviation from that norm, thereby highlighting the disparity between the two. Giora alludes to this aspect of irony when she states:

Indeed what is said often alludes to the desired situation/opinion/thought that the criticised state of affairs fails to comply with. The intended meaning is the realisation of the extent to which the state of affairs in question has fallen short of expectations usually made explicit by what is said.
(Giora 2003:94)

Irony is a particularly effective device for the dramatic satirist since, when hearers choose ironic meaning over literal, they do not lose sight of the literal. On the contrary: the literal meaning, although no doubt overshadowed by the ironic meaning, remains under consideration in the mind of the hearer and serves as a marker by which the gap between the two meanings can be measured. It is in that gap between the two meanings that the deviation from the norm can be best appreciated (see Chapter 3 in the present volume).

3. Impaired vision and erroneous evaluations

Pretence in Congreve’s satire provides a double opportunity to arouse the laughter of scorn (see Chapter 7 in the present volume). As we have noted, Congreve’s characters relentlessly share evaluative comments on the world around them. When ironists do this, they offer up an evaluation of the world that they (and the informed, discerning audience) know to be erroneous (the literal

meaning of the utterance is untenable). Therefore, the target is not only what is commented on and the deviation from the norm highlighted by the comment; it is also those individuals who might make such an erroneous evaluation and those who may adhere to the erroneous evaluation when it is expressed by someone else. The audience adhere to the ironic meaning expressed and to the negative critical evaluation that irony thinly veils. At the same time, by choosing ironic meaning over literal, the audience also laugh at whoever might endorse the literal meaning they (the audience) have rejected. As posited by the pretence theory, by pretending to believe an evaluation that is erroneous, the ironist targets those who have what Currie (2006: 118) has called “a defective view of the world”. Clark and Gerrig, in line with the pretence theory, identify two different victims of irony and define them as follows:

Irony generally has victims. According to the pretense [sic] theory, they should be of two kinds. The first is S', the unseeing or injudicious person the ironist is pretending to be. The Second is A', the uncomprehending audience not in the inner circle. Some ironies seem to make victims of S' for their misjudgements, and others, of A' for their uncritical acceptance of S'.
(Clark & Gerrig 1984: 122)

In the examples cited above, the utterances of Jeremy and of Mrs. Marwood, who are pretending to be injudicious, clearly target S'. By failing to perceive a valid ironic meaning, Tattle, Petulant and Witwoud are A'. Tattle does not appear to perceive Jeremy's evaluation of him as erroneous whereas the audience do. Mrs. Marwood's on-stage addressees also fail to detect any possible ironic meaning. The non-perception of irony on stage has implications for the performance: it makes for a concise wisecrack which does not slow down proceedings on stage but which keeps the audience on the alert. Ultimately, the example again confirms that by putting forward an erroneous evaluation, the ironist (here the dramatist) targets those who might make or unquestioningly accept such an evaluation, that is those who are incapable of distinguishing between accomplished Gentlemen and half-witted Beaus or between drunken bickering and learned debate. These examples show that untenable utterances, when taken literally by on-stage addressees, have a double satirical dimension: they highlight a deviation from a norm and at the same time expose those who make, or adhere to, erroneous evaluations.

If the untenable utterance is to target those who have a defective view of the world, then surely it is indeed most effective when on stage nobody flags up the impossibility of its literal meaning. What are the implications when the untenable is flagged up on stage? Does irony operate as effectively and to the same end? In the next example, the disparity between what is said and what is true is identified on stage by the addressee, who is also the target. Here, the target verbally

notes that literal meaning is untenable even though he fails to identify any possible ironic meaning. When Mrs. Frail refers to Ben, the smelly unkempt sailor, as “such a Handsome Young Gentleman”, it is clear that Ben – centre stage – is none of these things:

Ben. ...As for my part, may-hap I have no mind to Marry.

Mrs. Frail. That wou'd be pity, such a Handsome Young Gentleman.

Ben. Handsome! He, he, he, nay forsooth, an you be for Joking, I'll joke with you, for I love my jest...

(*Love for Love*, 3. 1. 302–307)

Within the microcosm of the play, it would be implausible that the speaker should intend to banter Ben. The audience know that Mrs. Frail aims instead to flatter him for at this stage in the play, he is expected to be Sir Sampson's sole heir and as such, she hopes, a possible suitor. However, for the audience, and for any clear-sighted on-stage character, the irony could not be more blatant. This example shows that discourse intended by the speaker to flatter may nevertheless have a negative impact on the target's face. Firstly, Mrs. Frail's affirmation compels the audience and other on-stage hearers to assess the sailor with the terms “handsome” and “young” precisely in mind. As Ben is physically present, it is easy to set in opposition the literal meaning of Mrs. Frail's utterance and what is immediately visible. The discourse simultaneously evokes norm-based expectations (handsomeness, youth) and a deviation from those norms in the shape of Ben who is precisely the opposite of handsome and young. The resulting disparity enhances the comic dimension of the incongruous figure and the laughter aroused is the laughter of scorn fed by the sailor's appearance. It can therefore be said that Mrs. Frail's comment is the source of an irony that threatens the target's face.

However, given that Ben flags up the untenable, he rejects and counters Mrs. Frail's evaluation of him. It can thus be suggested that his response effectively invalidates literal meaning. Ben interprets the discourse as not serious and defines it as “Joking”. His response – a dismissal of Mrs. Frail's affirmation as a mere joke – annuls the potentially face-enhancing implications of the literal and hints at the validity of an ironic meaning that could be retrieved through direct inversion of the literal. Theoretically, if Ben did not flag up literal meaning as untenable, then any injudicious persons hearing the comment might adhere to that literal meaning and Ben's face would not be damaged. But it may also be argued that the target's response here limits the face-damaging implications of the ironic meaning. Ben might be ugly but he is clear-sighted. His jovial reaction and his honesty make him a likeable figure and the audience quickly find themselves laughing with rather than at him. The laughter of scorn aroused by Ben's appearance quickly

gives way to scorn for Mrs. Frail and her foiled attempt to seduce the sailor. In fact, nobody – except Mrs. Frail, in desperate need of a husband – could adhere to the assessment she offers. Mrs. Frail's evaluation is erroneous but because we know that her aim is to flatter, we also know that her error is not a genuine one. Nevertheless, the example again confirms that, on Congreve's stage, irony serves to denounce those who have a defective view of the world, albeit one which is deliberately adopted.

4. Irony in banter: Connivance between speaker and audience

While Leech (1983) shows that banter manifests and reinforces social intimacy between two participants of relatively equal status, banter on Congreve's stage fosters intimacy between his skilled speakers and his contemporary audience. It is characteristic of the discourse of the intelligent characters who are skilled speakers and operates at the expense of ridiculous characters who are not skilled speakers. Congreve's banter, like irony, involves a superior and an inferior party. It reinforces that very distinction. The superior party includes those who use banter as intentional provocation and those who interpret it as it is intended. The inferior party is composed of the addressees it targets but also any addressees who fail to interpret it as it is intended (on stage but not usually in the audience). In the examples considered above, irony colours a single evaluative statement and ironic meaning is arrived at through the direct inversion of literal meaning. However, where irony operates by subtly qualifying rather than by inverting literal meaning, we find not isolated utterances but whole dialogues informed by irony. Such dialogues constitute working demonstrations of the most complex type of banter. As such, they favour connivance between speaker and audience who come together to construct non-literal meaning at the expense of the target who is excluded from this collaborative effort. The arguments put forward by Clark and Gerrig (1984) in favour of the Pretence Theory rely on a definition of irony given by Fowler (1965) which illustrates particularly well the workings of irony in comedy:

Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and of the outsiders' incomprehension. [It] may be defined as the use of words intended to convey one meaning to the uninitiated part of the audience and another to the initiated, the delight of it lying in the secret intimacy set up between the latter and the speaker.

(Fowler quoted by Clark & Gerrig 1984: 121–122)

Our next dialogue carries specific mention of asides, leaving no doubt as to the connivance or “secret intimacy” binding speaker and audience. In *The Double-Dealer* (1694), Cynthia, the young heroine of the play, is subjected to the self-congratulatory waffle of the ridiculously effusive Lady Froth, whose discourse, as her name suggests, is overflowing with frothy enthusiasm for marital love. Here Cynthia’s apparent aim is to flatter her domineering elder by agreeing with her but the audience interpret Cynthia’s responses ironically, effectively making them also banter:

Enter Lady Froth and Cynthia.

Cynthia. Indeed, Madam! Is it possible your Ladyship could have been so much in Love?

Lady Froth. I could not sleep; I did not sleep one wink for Three Weeks altogether.

Cynthia. Prodigious! I wonder, want of sleep, and so much Love, and so much Wit as your Ladyship has, did not turn your Brain. (1)

Lady Froth. O my Dear Cynthia, you must not rally your Friend, – but really, as you say, I wonder too, – but then I had a way. For between you and I, I had Whimsies and Vapours, but I gave them vent.

Cynthia. How pray, Madam?

Lady Froth. O I Writ, Writ abundantly, – do you never Write?

Cynthia. Write, what?

Lady Froth. Songs, Elegies, Satyrs, Encomiums, Panegyricks, Lampoons, Plays, or Heroick Poems.

Cynthia. O Lord, not I, Madam; I’m content to be a Courteous Reader.

Lady Froth. O Inconsistent! In Love, and not Write! if my Lord and I had been both of your Temper, we had never come together, – O bless me! What a sad thing that would have been, if my Lord and I should never have met!

Cynthia. Then neither my Lord nor you would ever have met with your Match, on my Conscience. (2)

Lady Froth. O’ my Conscience, no more we should; thou sayst right – for sure my Lord Froth is as fine a Gentleman, and as much a Man of Quality! Ah! Nothing at all of the Common Air ... the very Phosphorus of our Hemisphere. Do you understand those Two hard Words? If you don’t, I’ll explain ‘em to you.

Cynthia. Yes, yes, Madam, I’m not so Ignorant. – (*aside*). At least I won’t own it, to be troubled with your Instructions.

(*The Double-Dealer*, 2. 1. 1–37)

When Lord Froth appears later in the scene, he is as pompous as his wife. After much bowing and kissing and several declarations of love, he asks Cynthia “Don’t

you think us a happy Couple?” Cynthia’s response to Lord Froth conveys the same irony as her responses to his wife:

Cynthia. I vow, my Lord, I think you the happiest Couple in the World, for you are not only happy in one another, and when you are together, but happy in your selves, and by your selves. (3)
(*The Double-Dealer*, 2. 1, 96–99)

For the audience, the discrepancy between literal and non-literal meaning in Cynthia’s statements is easily detected. Lady Froth’s pretentious discourse marks her as a ridiculous character. Enough is seen of Lord Froth previously to indicate that he is also likely to be the target of mockery. Cynthia - the young heroine of the play - is not likely to respond in a positive manner to the self-satisfied old couple. Furthermore, as pointed out previously, an untenable utterance in the discourse of a skilled speaker always arouses suspicion in the audience that a non-literal meaning is possible. It is one of the conventions of comedy.⁷

If the audience are to retrieve ironic meaning accurately, they must share the speaker’s judgement and norm-based expectations. Utterances (2) and (3) rely on a subtle, suggestive type of irony which makes them more difficult to decode than utterance (1). In these utterances, the non-literal meaning is in fact an *extension* of the literal. The Socratic ironist seemingly accepts the ideas of her interlocutor, using the same terms and structures: in (2), “if my Lord and I should never have met” is echoed in “Then neither my Lord nor you would ever have met...” in (3), “a happy Couple” inspires “the happiest Couple... happy in one another... happy in your selves”. While Cynthia pretends to approve of the ideas put forward by her interlocutor, her discourse has a non-literal meaning indicating that although she reaches the same conclusion, the reasons leading to that conclusion are not those of her interlocutor. Therefore, her evaluation is radically different to that of her interlocutor; it has strong negative implications. In both (2) and (3), where the ironic can be said to be an extension of the literal meaning, literal meaning simply confirms what has just been stated by Cynthia’s interlocutor whereas the non-literal meaning confirms *and* takes the interlocutor’s reasoning a step further. In (2) “Then neither my Lord nor you would ever have met with your Match”, the non-literal meaning can be summarised thus: had they not met, the Froths would both still be unmarried because neither

7. The scene illustrates the workings of Socratic irony as seen in Greek comedy where the *iron* was a falsely ingenuous character who got the better of his opponents in discussions by concealing his knowledge and understating his own abilities. A willingness to be instructed was also a common feature of the Socratic ironist. As they confront the *iron*, Lord and Lady Froth can be seen as playing the role of the *alazon* or self-deceiving braggart.

could ever have found anyone so equally egocentric. In (3), “I think you the happiest Couple in the World, for you are not only happy in one another, and when you are together, but happy in your selves, and by your selves”, the non-literal is as follows : the Froths are happy because their happiness is rooted in their egocentricity. Here the ironist’s strategy relies not on inversion but on a much more complex approach. Therefore, only those who share the ironist’s way of seeing things are likely to perceive the negative evaluation underpinning her statements. Not surprisingly, her interlocutors fail to do so. It is because such demonstrations of irony in banter constitute whole scenes that they are so effective in reinforcing connivance between speaker and audience and in strengthening the divide between those who have judgement and those who lack it.

It has been seen that banter, like irony, posits the existence of an inferior and a superior party. Paradoxically, in our next dialogue, a figure of authority is bantered by a servant: Valentine’s furious old father, full of spite, has arrived at his son’s lodgings with his Lawyer, determined to have his son sign away his inheritance rights. He is greeted at the door by his son’s manservant who must delay proceedings while his master, hidden from view, is putting the finishing touches to the disguise that will enable him to pass for a madman. If Valentine can have himself declared *non compos mentis*, he will elude signing any legal documents. Jeremy simulates confusion, an inability to find the correct terms. Like the Socratic ironist, he conceals his knowledge and understates his ability. Eventually, his target does suspect that meaning might be non-literal and identifies ‘banter’, a term which he uses as a transitive verb.

Sir Sampson. Ready, body o’ me, he must be ready; his Sham-sickness shan’t excuse him – O, here’s his Scoundrel. Sirrah, where’s your Master?

Jeremy. Ah, Sir, he’s quite gone. (4)

Sir Sampson. Gone! What, he is not dead?

Jeremy. No, Sir, not dead.

Sir Sampson. What, is he is gone out of Town, run away, ha! Has he trick’t me? Speak, Varlet.

Jeremy. No, no, Sir; he’s safe enough, Sir, an he were but as sound, poor Gentleman. He is indeed here, Sir, and not here, Sir. (5)

Sir Sampson. Hey day, Rascal, do you banter me? Sirrah, d’ye banter me – Speak Sirrah, where is he, for I will find him. (6)

(*Love for Love*, 4. 1. 116–129)

As seen here, banter clearly relies on figurative language. In (4), the literal meaning of “gone” would be “having taken one’s leave”; this possible meaning is not even considered by the addressee. Sir Sampson correctly suspects that a figu-

rative meaning may be intended but he chooses the wrong one (“deceased”). The discrepancy between literal and non-literal in the discourse is ultimately highlighted by the speaker himself when in (5), Jeremy explains that Valentine is “here” (literally) and “not here” (figuratively). It is when Jeremy juxtaposes “here” and “not here”, thereby emphasizing the figurative quality of his discourse, that Sir Sampson rightly suspects that such discourse is banter. The figurative meaning intended by Jeremy in (4) is clear to the audience: “quite gone” here means having taken leave of one’s senses (“gone in the head”). Indeed, only the audience can interpret the utterance correctly, since only the audience have the knowledge to link “gone” with “mad”. If verbal irony is taken as occurring when the intended meaning of an utterance differs from the literal meaning of that utterance, then this banter is coloured by verbal irony. It differs from the discourse we have considered so far in that it is not an evaluation of the on-stage addressee. What is also specific here is that the key to decoding Jeremy’s discourse lies in knowledge that the bantered man has been denied. It is a discrepancy of awareness that initially prevents Sir Sampson from detecting banter. It can be said therefore that banter here relies on irony that is both verbal and dramatic. Simpson quotes Gibbs et al. (1995: 189), who define dramatic irony as occurring when an utterance has “a meaning intelligible to the audience but of which the speaker is unaware” (Simpson 2011: 47) (on dramatic irony, see Chapter 10 in the present volume).

Later in the play, a rather different demonstration of banter is given by Tattle who pretends not to know old Foresight, the man whose daughter he had intended to marry just hours before. The banterer’s plans have changed, something Foresight is unaware of. Like Sir Sampson, Tattle also uses banter as a transitive verb as he announces his intention in an aside “I’ll banter him, and laugh at him, and leave him” (*Love for Love*, 5. 1. 263–264). And he does just that. As he is about to flee the stage, Tattle offers up a riddle that only the audience can decode. It is not, however, a riddle coloured by irony.

It can be seen in *Love for Love* that banter does not necessarily rely on verbal irony. It may exploit dramatic irony. Both the speakers identified as banterers in *Love for Love* exploit a discrepancy of awareness. Banter shares with irony a characteristic which Fowler (quoted by Clark and Gerrig 1984: 121–122) defined as: “the use of words intended to convey one meaning to the uninitiated part of the audience and another to the initiated”. Both banterers, like ironists, resort to the simulation of ignorance whether it is words (Jeremy) or acquaintances (Tattle) they pretend to have forgotten. Both flout Grice’s Maxim of Manner to favour ambiguity and obscurity. In Congreve’s comedies, banter, like irony, serves to strengthen a divide between the younger and the older generation and to show how younger, skilled speakers get the upper hand over their less skilled elders. It

even brings about a re-defining of the inferior and the superior party, an inversion of power that relies, like dramatic irony, on the inequality between the ignorant and the informed.

5. Irony, banter, and the simulation of ignorance as a face-saving strategy

It has been seen that where the validity of non-literal meaning goes unacknowledged by the on-stage addressee, the resulting laughter of scorn is fuelled not so much by the deviation from a norm that the discourse has highlighted as by the defective view of the world or the ignorance that the discourse reflects. Finally, however, Congreve's comedies also include dialogues in which the failure to acknowledge non-literal meaning appears as a willful choice on the part of the addressee. Our last dialogue confirms that where banter operates, the simulation of ignorance may serve as a face-saving strategy enabling the addressee (who is also the target here) to elude the criticism intended. It is seen therefore that it is not only the banterer but also the bantered party who may simulate ignorance or incomprehension. The dialogue is from *Love for Love* and the context is as follows: Mrs. Foresight has found a bodkin belonging to her sister Mrs. Frail in a Hackney carriage operating in the World's End district of London. This ill-reputed area of Chelsea was commonly known as a place of sexual assignation.⁸ The bodkin is proof of Mrs. Frail's illicit sexual behaviour since it shows that she has been undressed in the World's-End carriage! However, Mrs. Foresight is reluctant to accuse Mrs. Frail directly since if she reveals she has found the bodkin, she will inevitably be revealing that she has been frequenting the same carriages in the same undesirable district. In this exchange, Mrs. Foresight tries to reproach Mrs. Frail by claiming to have simply seen her alight from a carriage in the company of a man; the reproach immediately inspires a similar accusation. Both women feign ignorance and incomprehension in the way they construct their discourse but also in the way they receive it.

Mrs. Foresight. But can't you converse at home? – I own it, I think there's no happiness like conversing with an agreeable man; I don't quarrel at that, nor I don't think but your Conversation was very innocent (7); but the place is publick, and to be seen with a man in a Hackney-Coach is scandalous: What if any Body else shou'd have seen you alight as I did? – How can any Body be happy, while they're in perpetual fear of being seen and censur'd? – Besides, it wou'd not only reflect upon you, Sister, but me.

8. To "take a turn with one's Friend", as Mrs. Frail calls it (*Love for Love*, 2, 1, 419) was, in World's-End, to indulge in sexual activity inside the carriages circulating in that area.

Mrs. Frail. Pooh, here's a Clutter – why should it reflect upon you? – I don't doubt but you have thought your self happy in a Hackney-Coach before now (8). – If I had gone to Knights-bridge, or to Chelsey, or to Spring-Garden, or Barn-Elms with a man alone – something might have been said.

Mrs. Foresight. Why, was I ever in any of these places? What do you mean Sister?

Mrs. Frail. Was I? What do you mean?

Mrs Foresight. You have been at a worse place.

Mrs. Frail. I at a worse place, and with a man!

Mrs. Foresight. I suppose you would not go alone to the *World's-End*.(9)

Mrs. Frail. The World's end! What, do you mean to banter me? (10)

Mrs. Foresight. Poor innocent! you don't know that there's a place call'd the World's-End? I'll swear you can keep your countenance purely, you'd make an Admirable Player. (11)

(*Love for Love*, 2. 1. 426–452)

The two women simulate ignorance and incomprehension to veil the accusations they level at one another: Mrs. Foresight pretends to believe that conversation taking place in the carriages at the World's End is “innocent” (7). The audience, however, know that her ignorance is feigned and that straightforward oppositional irony colours this first affirmation. They are perfectly familiar with the World's End district and so literal meaning is untenable here. Mrs. Frail plays along, pretending to agree in order to return the accusation and adopts the same convoluted syntax: “I don't think but...” becomes “I don't doubt but...” (8). This time, the non-literal meaning is an extension of the literal and relies on the simulation of ignorance that has been initiated by Mrs Foresight. (Literal meaning: indeed Mrs. Foresight has felt happy in a Hackney-Coach before now. Non-literal: Mrs. Foresight has felt very happy in a Hackney-Coach before now but it certainly was not on account of any innocent conversation). Eventually, it is the precision of the reference to the spot where the bodkin was found, to the “World's-End” (9) which makes literal meaning so implausible that the target can feign incomprehension no longer. The speaker's aim to banter is here identified and loudly denounced by the target: “What, do you mean to banter me?” (10). In response, the speaker denounces the target's ability to simulate ignorance, to “pretend” as would a “Player” or actress (11). In this final demonstration of banter, the space between apparent and intended meaning created by irony would have been adequately filled by contemporary audiences who knew all too well what went on in World's End. The piece is therefore key to the satiric dimension of a comedy said to hold up a mirror to the society of the time. The ability to simulate ignorance was commonly demonstrated by women characters in Restoration comedy in order to preserve their reputations; it was something that female spectators were also

encouraged to do. In Congreve's last comedy, *The Way of the World*, Petulant recommends that women feign ignorance to avoid blushing: "Then let 'em either shew their Innocence by not understanding what they hear, or else shew their Discretion by not hearing what they would not be thought to understand" (*The Way of the World*, 1. 1. 529–532).

It is no doubt this same face-saving strategy based on the simulation of ignorance that the dramatist invites his audience to adopt when he uses irony to banter contemporary society. Congreve uses the figure of the madman to present some home truths about London life in *Love for Love*. By having an accurate picture of the present time offered up as the prophetic ramblings of a character playing the fool, the dramatist targets the debauched London audience. Truth about the here and now is disguised as an ominous warning about the future: "Dost thou know what will happen to morrow? – Answer me not – for I will tell thee. To morrow, Knaves will thrive thro' craft, and Fools thro' Fortune; and Honesty will go as it did, Frost nip't in a Summer suit. Ask me questions concerning to morrow?" (4. 1. 490–494). To reach intended meaning, it would suffice to put the verbs in the present tense and replace "To morrow" by "Today". Taken literally, the discourse situates the reprehensible facts in the virtual future. Non-literally, it enables the dramatist to satirise and to present a critical judgement ironically. A contemporary audience would indeed have felt "bantered". The same face-saving simulation of ignorance was also required when Congreve presented his last prologue in *The Way of the World*. It is the ultimate illustration of how the ironist banter his target by simulating ignorance, in this case in order to denounce hypocrisy, a flaw that might be defined as a "defective view" willfully adopted. It reads thus: "Satire... you ought not to expect,/ For so Reform'd a Town, who dares Correct?" (Prologue to *The Way of the World* 1700).

6. Conclusion

It has been seen that because irony makes it possible to conjure up a norm-based expectation and an element that flouts that expectation at the same time, it is a valuable satirical device. On Congreve's stage, the discrepancy between what is said and what is true may be immediately visible, making it easy to identify an utterance as untenable and to detect a non-literal meaning. More often, however, given Congreve's satirical aim, the dramatist expects his audience to use their understanding of norms and expectations shared by the fictional and non-fictional worlds in order to detect that non-literal meaning.

As we have shown, not all utterances that are untenable and carry a potentially valid non-literal (ironic) meaning can be said to reflect the aim to banter. At the

same time, not all banter is coloured by irony. It has been shown, however, that irony is an essential characteristic of banter, as defined by Samuel Johnson. The importance of irony in banter – where the term banter covers both (playful) rallying and (harsher) ridiculing – might be explained as follows: irony allows the addressee (who is the target) the option of choosing literal meaning over non-literal. Where non-literal meaning is flagged up by the target on stage, the dialogue breaks down. More often than not, however, non-literal meaning goes undetected on stage and the audience are expected to retrieve it. In this state of affairs, the target is not only the deviation from a norm which has been highlighted by irony but also the injudicious person whom the on-stage addressee, by failing to detect non-literal meaning, has proven to be. In Congreve's comedies, irony and banter make linguistic interaction a game. The theatre with its double communication situation is the best arena in which the game can be played and, better still, observed.

As they are demonstrated in Congreve's comedies, the discursive practices of verbal irony and banter share common features. Both rely on a discrepancy between the literal meaning and the non-literal meaning of an utterance. It has been seen that even banter that is not coloured by irony relies on figurative language, on a discrepancy between what is apparent and what is intended. Both practices involve pretence, the simulation of ignorance on the part of the speaker, and they may even inspire the same simulation of ignorance as a face-saving strategy in the addressee. Finally, both rely on – and indeed reinforce – connivance between in-groupers and out-groupers, on stage and beyond, a system in which a lack of judgement or of knowledge can make decoding discourse impossible. Of course, where irony is used to banter the audience directly, as in Congreve's final prologue, only Congreve's peers could accurately measure the space that lies between literal and intended meaning.

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The face-value of place-work in William Makepeace Thackeray's handling of irony

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Irony is admittedly a well-established and well-documented feature in William Makepeace Thackeray's works, but the present contribution undertakes to study its textual mechanisms in light of pragmatic theories complemented with a specific structural approach, referred to as "place-work." The purpose is to highlight that from the perspectives of both creation and reception, the mechanisms of Thackerayan irony involve the distribution of one, two or three "places," alternately or cumulatively occupied by the ironist and his addressee(s), whether narrator, commentator, characters, and readers alike. This ever-changing "topology" of irony results in the constant reshuffling of roles and places typically at work in Thackeray's writings, and underlines as well the structural instability of irony.

1. Introduction

Irony is a well-established feature in William Makepeace Thackeray's novels, lectures, chronicles and essays, to the point that it has been termed a "given," (Catalan 2009:7) and is even taken to account for his real-life attitudes or statements. However, as his works demonstrate, this terminological unity might be deceptive, since it conceals a conceptual duality captured by two main traditional definitions. When Thackeray stages an apparently ingenious commentator to lay bare his characters' flaws and foibles, tirelessly making a point of deflating over-inflated egos, he relies on the stance taken by the *eirōn* in ancient Greece's tradition, who speaks in understatements, deliberately appears less intelligent than he actually is and by such pretence triumphs over the *alazon*, the block-headed braggart (Abrams 1981:89). (On 'eirōn', see Chapter 6 in the present volume). On the other hand, Thackeray and his multi-faceted narrators recurrently use verbal irony in the sense Roman rhetoricians give the term (Cuddon 1977:458), in utterances whose implicit meaning contradicts what is asserted, or simply differs from it, with the expectation that the hearer or reader will retrieve the embedded message. These two types of irony, related by the diachronic feature of double-edgedness

(Cuddon 1977:458), aim at social satire, which in Thackeray is more of a Horatian than a Juvenalian kind. His bitter-sweet approach often involves banter and its typically playful tone – in the standard acceptance of the term that will be qualified in the third section of this study thanks to Geoffrey Leech’s contribution to the definition – so much so that it has owned Thackeray the nickname of “British Horace” (Las Vergnas 1932:61).

The present contribution to the study of irony focuses on Thackeray’s handling of its mechanisms throughout an extended and varied corpus in an attempt to do justice to the writer’s imposing body of works, and also offers a model based on existing pragmatic theories. This epistemological approach is complemented by the concept of “placework”, whose initial justification lies in the spatial nature of irony, built on two layers of meaning and interpreted with reference to a lateral context. Thus, the structure of this chapter presents irony as managing one, two or three sites, or “places”.¹ Firstly, from the perspective of strategic use, these positions are occupied by the ironist and his victim(s), within a frame of ever-changing configurations involving author, narrator, characters, overhearer and reader. Secondly, the concept of placework more specifically sheds light on the reception of irony in various ways. The reception of irony, when devoid of any disambiguation, can arguably be claimed to require one single functional place, that of the interpreting reader. Yet, the felicity of the processing is orientated by the presence of discursive clues, hence the collaboration between addressor and addressee, which entails the necessity of two places. Finally, the structure can include up to three places, if a commentator steps in to secure the recovery of irony, or when narrative instability places the reader in no position to choose between tropic and non-tropic meaning.

2. Topology of irony: Placework and speaker’s strategy

Topology, which deals with the properties of space preserved in spite of constant deformations, is used metaphorically to study irony in strategies based on the various places taken by the ironic speaker(s) and hearer(s).

2.1 The one-place structure of self-directed irony

Irony occupies a single place when the speaker turns it against himself and indulges in a form of self-derision, in a process similar to the one Lecercle analyses (2008:73). He then rhetorically constructs his own, insular territory, where he is

1. I am indebted to Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s structural analysis of humour in “Y a-t-il de l’humour dans *Alice*?” (2008).

at the same time subject and object of discourse.² At the beginning of his career, Thackeray is prone to deflating his own authorial figure, particularly so in *Vanity Fair*, the first novel he writes in his own name. In this text, he downgrades his discursive ethos into that of a “Manager of the Performance” (1983:1), a mere puppeteer who handles the “wires” of his characters (1983:2), and finally disqualifies his discourse by taking on the preposterous identity of a court jester wearing “a cap and bells” and “grinning and tumbling” (1983:19). Far from corresponding to the image of a solitary, God-inspired genius of whom the audience should stand in awe, he is just one among many other “brother wearers of motley” who earn a living in the “story-telling trade” (1983:95).

Ironically, degrading novel-writing from a somewhat noble art to a common business activity may be the expression of an internal conflict which combines the usual unease of the novelist with actual elements of Thackeray's biography. Specifically during the years of his collaboration for the popular magazine *Punch*, Thackeray fights for the “dignity of literature” (Peters 1999:120), but he is also aware of the necessity to compromise and supply the recreational reading the public demands, in the context of a new market economy. The ironic stance then rests on a “dissociative attitude” (Sperber & Wilson 1992:65), drawing attention to a disparity between the current state of affairs and the world as it should be. Such belittling is also at work in an illustration that Thackeray chooses to draw for an original wrapper to the monthly numbers of *Vanity Fair*, producing a trans-artistic representation of a foolish speaker wearing a dunce's cap (1983:LI). This sketch proves to be the narrator's self-portrait, as is borne out by a parenthetical assertion within the novel: “(...) the moralist, who is holding forth on the cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant)” (1983:95). He pictures himself with donkey's ears, a choice which suggests an “echoic interpretation of an attributed thought or utterance,” on which irony is generally based (Sperber & Wilson 1992:65), more precisely an intertextual one. It reads as an indirect quote from Thomas Carlyle's 1832 diatribe against the “Novelwright (...) the Foolishest of existing mortals,” a flawed biographer who writes a “Long-ear of a fictitious Biography” (Sutherland 1983:881).

In Sperber and Wilson's terms, irony thus “involves the expression of an attitude of disapproval (...). The speaker echoes a thought she attributes to someone else, while dissociating herself from it with anything from mild ridicule to savage scorn” (1992:60). In these instances, irony at one's own expense hinges on a minor form of ridicule, and unsurprisingly produces a comic effect. Indeed, the purpose of humour here is to release the pressure felt by the frustrated young author, who

2. The proximity of Thackeray and his narrators encourages one to opt for a masculine narrator; it does not mean that I ignore feminist agendas.

attempts to cope with personal conflicts and professional struggles. In addition, self-directed irony is an empowering move, for it establishes a single locus for both self-condemnation and self-promotion, while the critical distance it requires asserts the narrator's superior ethos.

Self-directed irony is a defense mechanism in more ways than one, for it is also used to deflect criticism leveled at others, as is the case in the weekly papers at first called *The Snobs of England*. They lampoon “[h]e who meanly admires mean things,” as the definition of a snob goes (1945:68–70), and the chronicler himself, called “Mr Snob” (1945:150), admits to having been taken for one (1945:56). When the text is printed in book-form, Thackeray sends a self-derisive message even more clearly by altering the title of the volume, now called *The Book of Snobs, By One of Themselves*. The tactical addition of the subtitle undermines the vantage point and moral superiority of the author by explicitly fusing the places of the ironist and his victims, and thereby softens the attack, since the dividing line between subject and object of criticism has disappeared. When it was released in *Punch* from 1846 to 1847, the text was admittedly very popular, but some found it offensive, so much so that even “London clubmen (...) grew a little nervous of Thackeray when he dined at the same table with them” (Greig 1959:93). Worse still, such a close acquaintance of Thackeray's as Douglas Jerrold, also on the *Punch* staff, was hurt by the charge against vulgarians who “eat peas with their knives” (1945:61), and sensed he was personally targeted in the indictment of radicals who want to abolish the aristocracy and yet toady to them (Peters 1999:120). However, the rhetoric of atonement risks being overlooked, as is shown in this real-life anecdote related by Anthony Trollope:

When [Thackeray] was in America he met at dinner a literary gentleman of high character, middle-aged, and most dignified in deportment. The gentleman was one whose character and acquirements stood very high, – deservedly so, – but who, in society, had that air of wrapping his toga about him, which adds, or is supposed to add, many cubits of a man's height. But he had a broken nose. At dinner he talked much of the tender passion, and did so in a manner which stirred up Thackeray's feeling of the ridiculous. “What has the world come to,” said Thackeray out loud to the table, “when two broken-nosed old fogies like you and me sit talking about love to each other!” The gentleman was astounded and could only sit wrapping his toga in silent dismay for the rest of the evening. Thackeray then, as at other similar times, had no idea of giving pain, but when he saw a foible he put his foot up on it, and tried to stamp it out.
(1925:60–61)

All the ingredients of irony, more precisely Socratic irony, are present here. The “literary gentleman,” with his exaggerated sense of self-importance, is the *alazon*. This posture is emphasized by the dignified gesture of “wrapping his toga about

him," a Greek sartorial detail that ironically backfires on him by turning the scene into a maieutics session of sorts. In this configuration, Thackeray is the *iron* and succeeds in "stamping out" the gentleman's "foible" with an exclamation by which he obviously, and maybe primarily, targets himself – he too is a successful, perhaps conceited middle-aged writer, and he does have a broken nose, as a result of a fight when he was a pupil at the Charterhouse.

Including himself into the scope of irony may be regarded as a deft attempt at face-saving indirectness, in Brown and Levinson's terminology (1987: *passim*). The speaker purposefully weakens his dysphemism by threatening his own positive face as much as the gentleman's, and he can hardly be deemed guilty of a blunder at the latter's expense. An alternative interpretation however leads to the opposite conclusion, and is more in keeping with the *iron*'s typical posture as "the underdog, a feeble but crafty and quick-witted character" of Greek comedy (Cuddon 1977: 458). The problem then translates into economic terms of loss and profit, when the ironist is prepared to sacrifice a little of his own positive face for the sake of disparaging the overblown self-presentation of others. In fact, self-directed irony as a mere excuse to get the better of others may also be intended in the above-mentioned illustration for the wrapper of *Vanity Fair*. The Thackerayan speaker's decision to wear a dunce's hat is designed to soften the derogatory representation of a similarly-clad audience – the actual primary butt of irony – also explicitly reduced to donkeys in the face-threatening statement "the long-eared livery in which the congregation is arrayed" (1983: 95).

Self-directed irony proves therefore difficult to stabilize in one single place, firstly because it is a self-enclosed figure encapsulating two positions, that of the ironist and that of his victim, and secondly because it tends to fuse the irony directed to self and to others. In consequence, this approach must be complemented with a second form of irony, specifically aimed at others, namely the novels' characters or the readers.

2.2 The two-place structure of irony directed to others

First and foremost, Thackeray conducts an assault from his own marginal position by looking for points of weakness in the institutional territory, in keeping with the tradition of satire. (On 'satire', see Chapter 6 in the present volume). To do so, he targets well-known literary genres through parody, based on irony insofar as "both involve an echoic allusion and a dissociative attitude" (Sperber & Wilson 1992: 62). In *Novels by Eminent Hands*, the piece entitled "Codlingsby" mockingly mimics the overwrought style of Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby*, while "George de Barnwell" derides Edward Bulwer-Lytton's inflated manner of writing – Thackeray is reported to have been banned from trying his hand at Charles Dickens, who

was certainly too popular to be placed in the position of a threatened *alazon* and have his stature reduced accordingly.

Throughout his literary career though, it seems that Thackeray cannot help using “some neighbouring quip or sneer” when he evokes “gentle and kind things,” as John Forster deplores in 1848 (1968:54). In the *Irish Sketch Book*, based on an actual trip to Ireland, Thackeray punctually exposes the romantic tendency of travellers’ logbooks or guidebooks to extol sublime sceneries. Following his own realistic principle, the observer claims that the Bay of Dublin is impossible to describe because it is dark when he arrives (1911:2), and finally deems it superior to the Bay of Naples, but merely on account of its delicious herrings, he explains, as opposed to the useless dolphins in the latter (1911:9). An equivalent “red herring” deflates the Gothic tradition it echoes, this time, in a manner that is reminiscent of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. The visitor of the library in the *Sarcophagus*, a London club in the *Book of Snobs*, inadvertently opens up a secret niche, and yet fails to disclose anything eerie or scary:

- (1) (...) he selected Volume VII, to which he was attracted by the singular fact that a brass door-handle grew out of the back. Instead of pulling out a book, however, he pulled open a cupboard, only inhabited by a lazy housemaid’s broom and duster (...).
(1945:430)

No sooner are expectations created by mentions of recognizable literary genres than they are shattered by the iconoclastic ironic stance, thus producing humour and laughter, arising from what can relevantly be defined in Kantian terms here as “the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (Morreall 1983:16).

On a larger scale, Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon* undermines the romanticized conception of the rogue, with an attack on the *Newgate Novel* reminiscent of the one conducted in *Catherine*, a novel published in 1839, whose ironic denunciation was unfortunately misconstrued. This time, however, the novelist is unwilling to take risks, so he devises a specific configuration in the 1844 version of his narrative by having a fictitious editor of the memoirs, one George Savage Fitz-Boodle (a name he had used as a pseudonym before, so an avatar of himself, in a way), undercut the eponymous rascal’s ethos. At the structural level, contrapuntal comments in the form of seemingly innocuous remarks, located in footnotes at first, question Barry Lyndon’s claimed objectivity and sincerity, as when the latter indicts two adventurers while saying nothing of his own dishonesty:

- (2) The editor of the *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* cannot help pointing out here a truth which seems to have escaped the notice of the amiable autobiographer, viz. that there were more than two impostors present at Captain and Mrs. Fitzsimons's table (...). It never seems to have struck Mr. Barry that had he not represented himself to be a man of fortune none of the difficulties here described would have occurred to him.
(1984:57)

The *iron*-like George Savage Fitz-Boodle sounds polite and tiptoes around the one he calls "the amiable biographer," but in accordance with his double-edged name, he is nonetheless "Savage," for he undermines the narrator's case by denouncing a biased account. Further down in the text, he claims he has damning evidence against the villain, euphemistically referring to "unedifying" documents (1984:234), and inserts his remarks within the memoirs themselves so that both fictional and editorial voices are granted equal status, in an increasingly overt heuristic process at the expense of the braggart.

A more conventional narrative structure shows an omniscient narrator intent on undermining romance and its idealistic depictions of the social scene in fashionable novels of his time. In the early, 1850 version of *Pendennis*, the ironic gaze follows the characters backstage to reveal the unsavoury truth about them. Blanche Amory's cruelty is exposed when the hyper-sensitive self-styled poetess bearing over-determined names is seen in her private apartments bullying and blackmailing her maid (1994:998). By repeatedly referring to Blanche as "the Muse" (1994:998), the narrator uses pragmatic insincerity to reinforce the lack of fit between the commonly shared image of the inspirational feminine figure and the mean young woman, whose real nature remains hidden from the public sphere. However, no sooner is irony aimed at Blanche in this classic pattern of distributive justice than it is redirected towards the readers, who suddenly find themselves put in her place, within a reconfigured lay-out called "this world," that is the actual world:

- (3) And I do not know whether there are any other ladies in this world who treat their servants or dependents so, but it may be that there are such, and that the tyranny which they exercise over their subordinates, and the pangs which they can manage to inflict with a soft voice and a well-bred simper, are as cruel as those which a slave-driver administer with an oath and a whip.
(1994:998)

With this final twist, the interpellated audience now stands accused, and a cumulative rather than alternative cast turns the two-place structure of irony into a three-place one, involving the narrator, the characters and the reader.

2.3 The three-place structure of redirected irony

This triangular approach offers a wider range of combinations by creating constant redirection of irony. Thereby, Thackeray keeps reconfiguring the ironical attacks and readjusting the targets, thus turning the battle into a guerilla warfare thanks to a typically flexible method of composition or unstable scope of address.

Firstly, his fictional characters exploit a three-place ironic form of communication to avoid straightforward confrontation, a tactic which proves suitable for the weak or the disadvantaged. It serves as a weapon for those in need of empowerment, whose domination of the scene is questioned, hence the fragmentation of the discursive plane. The stratagem is strikingly visible when Lord Bullington, now under the authority of a new father since his mother has married Barry Lyndon, dons the mask of the *iron* and apparently addresses his younger half-brother to attack his step-father over his low birth, as the latter relates:

(4) My Lord would begin his violent and undutiful sarcasms at me.

“Dear child,” he would say, beginning to caress and fondle him, “what a pity it is I am not dead for thy sake! The Lyndons would then have a worthier representative, and enjoy all the benefit of the illustrious blood of the Barrys of Barryogue; would they not, Mr. Barry Lyndon?”

(1984:270)

Although the intended addressee is given the positions of overhearer and witness, he perfectly understands that the charge conveyed by the ironical antiphrasis “illustrious blood” is aimed at him. No invectives or derogatory words are uttered to convey the message’s illocutionary force, but the perlocutionary effect of irony is so severe that the victim calls it a “sarcasm,” a crude, even ferocious offense, as underlined by Greek etymology, *sarkein*, or literally *tear the flesh*. In *The Newcomes*, the over-determined topic of match-making is dealt with an equivalent tactic, when in order to denounce the notorious marriage-market, the heiress Ethel appears at dinner with a ticket saying “sold” pinned to her dress and comments, apparently addressing her father: “I am number 46 in the Exhibition of the Gallery of Painters” (1995:362). Admittedly, irony targets her own person and the materialistic Victorian society, thus staging a confrontation between herself and the establishment, but in fact, a third party is drafted in. The message is particularly intended for her scheming, money-minded grandmother who, unlike anyone else around, takes the hint and bounces to “[tear] the card out of Ethel’s bosom” (1995:362), as if reciprocating the sarcastic words with savage deeds. Mediated irony and its three-place strategy is a form of “communicational trope” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1996:19), an expression which could profitably be reversed into that of “tropic communication.” This form of irony is

then a trope of a trope, or a “turn” operating on a “turn” (*trope* means *turn* in Greek), because it deviates what is already oblique – but is far from dooming it to nonsense or misunderstanding. Such use of tropic communication is found at macro-structural level, in novels which offer tribunes for the subaltern writer to indict, or only satirize society.

In this light, it is significant that the narrator in his own name circulates ironic messages within the three-place framework, as outlined in *Vanity Fair's* programmatic foreword. The ternary layout is made up by the ever-present “Manager of the Performance” (1983:1) who sometimes “steps down from the platform” (1983:2) to turn into a commentator of the puppet-like characters, and finally the audience. Whether they are the narrator's allies or targets, the surrounding parties within or without the narrative are ceaselessly addressed, in accordance with Thackeray's poetics of “constant communication with the reader” referred to in *Pendennis's* preface (1994:lv). One version of this template is used when Becky Sharp, who has just written an endearing letter to the wealthy Miss Crawley in her husband's name, is made to claim ingeniously “[s]he won't recognize my hand in *that*” (1983:311). By placing this remark in the naïve manipulator's mouth just before the recipient sees the blatant fraud, the narrator means to expose Becky's sometimes excessive confidence in her own abilities. In so doing, he also strives to side with the audience, or in his own parlance “laugh[s] confidentially in the reader's sleeve” (1983:96). Aiming for a more political message in *The Book of Snobs*, he resorts to a similar technique to diminish the status of a certain Gorgius (arguably a fictional avatar of the conceited, overweight George IV), through the satirical comparison of a “great big boa-constrictor”: “And [Gorgius] smiled with such irresistible fascination, that persons who were introduced into his august presence became his victims, body and soul, as a rabbit becomes the prey of a great big boa-constrictor” (1945:72). This jocular remark strengthens the cohesion of the two conniving parties, that of the narrator and that of the reader, against a third. The satirist weaponizes irony to strike an alliance with the paying reading patron, often from the middle classes – admittedly reduced to defenseless “rabbits” – against the prominent members of society. Deflating the stature of the so-called great is recurrent in Thackeray, who sketches Nelson's Column with the Admiral standing on his head in *Vanity Fair* (1983:L), while George Washington undergoes an equivalent treatment through an understatement evoking him as someone “who performed the job [of kicking John Bull out of America] to satisfaction” in *The Book of Snobs* (1945:50). Worse still, in *The Virginians*, published eleven years later, the portrait of America's glorious hero as an average man is such that it “aroused much resentment among the American readers, who had expected a heroic cartoon” (Ray 1946:92). Those who are fond of romantic acts of bravery

are given but a “homely story” (1983:61) – which indeed stays clear of the battlefield. In this new triangle, the narrator emerges as the only great figure, for he stands alone against his thus belittled *alazon* and his subsequently disappointed and frustrated audience. Finally, denouncing snobbery leads him to abandon this vantage point, for the butt of irony comes to include the characters, the readers and himself into the all-encompassing word “everybody” in “Everybody went to wait upon this great man – everybody who was asked: as you the reader (do not say nay) or I the writer hereof would go if we had an invitation” (1983:476). All along, the Thackerayan narrator impersonates the “humorous preacher” he refers to in *Charity and Humour* (1912:282), keeping in mind the concluding statement of *The Book of Snobs*, “if Fun is good, Truth is still better, and Love best of all” (1945:452). Indeed, most of his teasing is best construed as “banter” in the sense Geoffrey Leech gives the term, an impolite way of being polite to reinforce in-group solidarity (1983:144) (on ‘banter’, see Chapters 6 and 8 in the present volume).

Whatever the variety and scale of these configurations, the recurrent drafting of the prototypical “readers” is a constant feature, which points to the fact that the ironic strategy heavily relies on their presence and more importantly on their involvement in reception.

3. Topography of irony: Placework and hearer’s reception

This section focuses on irony from the point of view of the hearer or reader. Granted that irony is often described as hinging on two “planes” of meaning, it seems relevant to base the analysis of its reception on a spatial approach. The trope then translates in topographical terms as the mapping out of the territory of discourse that has to be made sense of through the interpretive process.

3.1 The one-place structure of interpretation of irony

Firstly, it seems that most ironical utterances have no intrinsic markings which flag them as such, so in the deciphering process, the readers are even more in charge of the ultimate construction of meaning. They thus occupy what can be called a one-place structure, as cartographers of utterances which are ambiguous as long as either literal or tropic value has not been established. Indeed, it can be argued that nothing in many a verbal sequence distinguishes an ironical assertion from a non-ironical one. To borrow from John Searle’s analyses of fiction, there are no syntactic or semantic clues that unmistakably mark irony any more than there is a “textual property that will identify a stretch of discourse as a work of fiction” (1979:68), for the difference lies in the speaker’s intention, or “the illo-

cautionary stance that the author takes towards it" (1979:65). The ironic intent may however surface in non-verbal items, like intonational patterns and its set of heuristics, among which the tone, the emphasis on certain words, or a different rhythm, possibly translated in a text by typographical marks like italics or suspension dots. No such obvious tokens have been found in Thackeray's production, so it appears plausible, even structurally quite likely, that in the last resort it is entirely up to the readership to decide whether an utterance is ironical, hence the risk of misinterpretation. In *The Newcomes*, such hazard is alluded to through comments on a press article written by Clive, a fictional, fictitious author, whose "irony was so subtle that half the readers of the paper mistook his grave scorn for respect, and his gibes for praise" (1995:858). If the intent is clear for "half the readers," it also misfires in the same proportion, thereby questioning an audience's capacity to understand irony, admittedly of an extremely "subtle" kind here. Thackeray himself was exposed to the dangers of mistaken interpretation more than once. This notoriously happened with one of *Pendennis's* light remarks about the possibility of falling in love even with "the oldest, the ugliest, the stupidest and most pompous (...), the greatest criminal, tyrant, Bluebeard, Catherine Hayes, George Barnwell (...)" (1994: 1003). Although the moralist was in good faith when he was quoting the names of heinous murderers as prototypical instances, he caused public outrage among the Irish community, who thought he was ironically aiming at the then popular Dublin singer Catherine Hayes (Sutherland 1994: 1053). Thackeray had to clarify the intended meaning of what he refers to as "a previous unfortunate sentence" in a subsequent chapter (1994:678) – and finally chose to withdraw the passage in the novel's 1864 revised edition to avoid all threat of further misunderstanding from a visibly touchy, ill-informed public, who would read irony in the passage, whatever the author's design and protests. Such an extreme situation called for desperate measures, and because Thackeray was confronted with wrathful readers, he went for the only safest way to neutralize any irony, and deleted the whole controversial passage.

Conversely, an audience could just as well take some comments as "serious" and "literal," thus considering them to be delivered by a "maker of an assertion [who] commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition," in Searle's wording (1979: 62). Such is the case for the following disquisition:

- (5) By pushing steadily, nine hundred and ninety-nine people in a thousand will yield to you. (...) How well your money will have been laid out, O gentle reader, who purchase this; and, taking the maxim to heart, follow it through life! You may be sure of success. If your neighbour's foot obstructs you, stamp on it; and do you suppose he won't take it away?
(1995:95)

The author's "modest proposal," whose ruling principle is reminiscent of Jonathan Swift's extended *Modest Proposal*,³ is an obvious invitation for the addressee to react by activating his moral compass and conclude that the Thackerayan entreaty is a parodic echo of conduct-books, mass-produced in the nineteenth century. Yet, the historical change in the urban and social living conditions in this pre-Darwinian context makes it sound plausible that such advice can be construed as non-ironical. The message conveys the urgency for the apostrophized "gentle reader" to toughen up and switch to survival mode. Ultimately, the reader can decide to take the promotion of cut-throat, or rather foot-stamping individualism at face value and thus actualize the misfire of the ironic intent.

In view of this danger, the author and his narrator strive to counterbalance the reader's freedom, thereby limiting the possibility of being misinterpreted. In other words, the reception of irony hardly ever involves self-contained, one-place structures, and has more to do with interaction and collaboration of both ends of the communication chain.

3.2 The two-place structure of flagged irony

This collaborative pattern forms a two-place structure, with on the one hand the speaker/writer who flags the territory with more or less tenuous signs to force the activation of irony, and on the other the hearer/reader, caught in an interpretive grid designed to orientate the recognition of the trope.

Irony is not always easily detected, but it is made accessible for whoever is willing to respond to the clues and smart enough to find them – or is not unwilling to catch the hint and not dumb enough to overlook it. This is the bet made by the Thackerayan narrator in *Vanity Fair*, when he exploits the *topos* of courtship, summoning the reader's general knowledge, which is also knowledge shared by both of them, namely the significant efforts usually made to leave young people on their own in order to facilitate amorous exchanges or marriage proposals. Therefore, it becomes easy to deal with the blatant pose of ignorance and apparent urge to be instructed at stake in "I don't know (...) why, presently, Amelia went away (...); but Jos was left alone with Rebecca" (1983: 44). This rather simple scheme to get irony across is complexified within the same novel, when mutually-shared knowledge and contextual clues combine, thanks to the juxtaposition of a chapter's heading and its specific content. In the title "Arcadian Simplicity" (1983: 113), the literary convention of a bucolic setting is refuted by the subsequent presentation of the dysfunctional Crawley household. As a consequence, it refers to the

3. As everyone recalls, Swift's ironic text advocates selling the excess children as food to put an end to poverty in Ireland.

poetic ideal only deviously, as the narrative moves away from the idealized path the section had opened. Since the ironical charge becomes apparent only in retrospect, the narrator contains the risk of its being overlooked or forgotten by also inserting it in the diegesis itself. Accordingly, the following chapter starts with the observation “[w]e must now take leave of Arcadia” (1983:131). At this point, Thackeray's handling of irony can be given a formal turn in Gricean terminology. Within the frame of conversational patterns, irony flouts the Maxim of Quality, which posits speaker's sincerity. Because the exchange must be assumed to be ruled by the Cooperative Principle and because the speaker cannot mean what he says, the hearer starts looking for implicatures, and finds out that the actual message is the opposite of what has been stated (Grice 1989: passim).

Yet, less straightforward instances do not require background knowledge or contextual analysis, but a close study of textual lay-out. The narrator provides a supporting context rich with semiotic arrangements to secure the interpretation through carefully-orchestrated juxtapositions, highlighting the contradiction between literal and figurative meanings. When he describes the teacher at the Grey Friars School “pouring out the thunders of his just wrath” (1994:22) after Pendennis has misconstrued a Greek sentence, Thackeray saturates the utterance by combining metaphor and hyperbole to direct attention to irony and emphasize its presence. He reveals the trouble in the normative scale, and in the case under scrutiny the disproportion between the schoolboy's grammatical error and the reaction of the educator, who calls it a “deadly crime” (1994:21). The speaker thus expresses “a belief ABOUT his utterance, rather than BY MEANS OF it” (Sperber & Wilson 1981:302), in what proves to be a satire of teaching methods. When signs interact to the point of sending mixed signals, glossing prosody and syntax is needed – as well as a good command of English. Irony can be flagged by configurations which upset standard collocational patterns, Alan Partington explains, using a quote from *Vanity Fair*, “Politics set in a short time after dessert” (2011:1788). Indeed, “set in” has a negative evaluation prosody on account of the items it normally co-occurs with, so the ironist's intention to belittle dinner-table politics becomes objectively clear. Likewise, it might be added, there are ironic overtones in the observation about ladies who “my-loved and my-deared each other most assiduously” (1983:576). The two socialites' expressions of genuine attachment clash with an “assiduous,” in other words artificial, contrived performance, thus denounced as superficial. In both cases, epilinguistic knowledge is meant to orientate the readers towards the ironic interpretation by helping them sense collocational mismatches. Elsewhere, they are alerted by a subtly puzzling use of punctuation in an apparently casual comment about Becky, “[s]he was in a pink dress, that looked as fresh as a rose” (1983:473). The comma placed after the word “dress” creates a pause and brings the reading process to a brief halt. Then,

the main clause forks out into a relative clause that blocks the semantic sequence, and redirects it towards what is actually dispraise in the guise of misdirected praise. In fact, considering the semantic elements the narrator assembles, two coordinated clauses were in order and should have read: “[s]he was in a pink dress *and* looked as fresh as a rose,” in accordance with the cliché, usually applied to a woman. This time, Grice’s pragmatic Maxim of Quantity (1989: *passim*) produces the implicature that the set phrase does not apply to the young woman herself, but only to her outfit, and posits the character’s lack of innocence, in a deft shift from non-ironical to ironical effect within the same discursive unit. Thackeray’s handling of syntax enables him to be covertly quizzical, but his rearrangements can become theatrically visible with more abrupt changes in direction after careful preparation. For instance, ruining a daughter’s positive self-image by exposing her failure to perform family duties is worded in such a way that what sounds at first like an aphoristic moral pronouncement branches out and becomes damning for her. Indeed, in “Maria Osborne (...) felt it her duty to see her father and sister as little as possible,” (1983:537) the beginning is a reminder of the norm, but then the assertion derails, unexpectedly so, for the last segment defeats the Markov chain, whose mathematical principle can be applied to pragmatics. Whereas the selection of the first element is free, constraint grows as the syntactic chain is deployed and proves maximal with the last segment, which should then have been “as much as possible.” To heighten effect, the incongruous ironic anticlimax can be teasingly delayed, thus keeping the reader in the dark as long as possible:

- (6) I hope the reader has much too good an opinion of Captain and Mrs. Crawley to suppose that they ever would have dreamed of paying a visit to so remote a district as Bloomsbury, if they thought the family whom they proposed to honour with a visit were not merely out of fashion, but out of money, and could be serviceable to them in no possible manner.

(1983:207)

Reversely, the production of the unsettling punch line is as economical as can be when Thackeray derides the “Country Snob” figure Ponto, whose “library mostly consists of boots” (1945:280). Only the very last letters turn a factual statement into an ironical deflation of the upstart’s intellectual pose, thanks to an *in cauda venenum* technique strikingly pushed to its limits. In an 1852 article, George Brimley points to the consistent reliance of Thackeray’s humour on the “incongruity theory” and insists on the deviation from the norm it results in:

Mr. Thackeray’s humour does not mainly consist in the creation of oddities of manner, habit, or feeling; but in so representing actual men and women as to excite a sense of incongruity in the reader’s mind – a feeling that the follies and

vices described are deviations from an ideal of humanity always present to the writer.

(1968:140)

Thackeray's anticlimactic moves challenge stereotyped conventions by confronting an ideal world and the shallow, materialistic vanity fair he walks his reader through, a place that can aptly be called "*Alazonia*," after Vladimir Jankélévitch's French coinage, "*Alazonie*" (1964:81). (On 'incongruity', see Sorlin in the present volume).

In the economy of meaning, the reader's subjective assessment requires less cognitive effort with deciphering literal sequences than making sense of the complex ironic assertion, whose uptake demands perilous calculations and recalculations. Although the narrator has been shown to deploy different tactics to limit the reader's interpretive freedom, still more can be done in terms of containment.

3.3 The three-place configuration of sign-posted irony

The most striking move consists in disambiguating irony with explicit confirmations of its presence, thus introducing yet another place, that of intradiegetic commentator, and turning the two-fold configuration into a triple one. In doing this, Thackeray tilts the balance of power by outnumbering the reader through two complementary diegetic figures and functions. Metatextual additions make irony impossible to miss by providing rhetorical definitions of what the speaker is actually doing. In *The Newcomes*, for example, the odious Barnes's jeering at the speech of the colonel's mate is said to have been performed "with an irony which (...) he cared less to conceal" (1995:176), an explicit designation reworded in the following paragraph through the anaphoric expression "those ironical cheers" to make the tropic regime unmistakably clear (1995:176). With an acute sense of poetic justice, the narrator deflates the ethos of the very same Barnes some fifty chapters further down. In his turn, the campaigning villain is made to become the butt of irony as he delivers a political speech, when the rowdy crowd vocally wonders "[w]ho drove his children out of the workhouse?" (1995:886). These reactions, at first designated by the understatement "unkind personal questions," are then emphatically sign-posted as "ironical cries" (1995:886). Within the same novel, an extensive clarification is placed after an ironical development on spousal abuse, which is too serious a topic to allow for any possibility of misinterpretation:

(7) (...) So up with your cudgels, my enslaved injured boys!

Women will be pleased with these remarks, because they have such a taste for humour and understand irony (...). Dear ladies! I assure you I only am joking in the above remarks – I do not advocate the thrashing of your sex at all (...).

(1961:292)

The illocutionary force of the message is stressed by the mention of the trope it is based on, and is further strengthened by the final development on the figurative regime of discourse.

It must be granted that such disambiguation is rare, unsurprisingly so, because explained irony seems rather laboured and loses its edge. Nevertheless, an ultimate three-place structure is offered by banter to complete the present analysis of placework. It combines a speaker's two-fold utterance, in other words two places of enunciation that are irreducible to a single one, and the place of the interpreter. This reconfigured triangle is apparent in the following fictional episode of *Vanity Fair*, in which Becky Sharp writes a letter to Rawdon her husband. She repeatedly calls him a "*monstre*" (1983:672), a choice to be understood as an asteism – for the spelling and the italics flag the word as French, the conventional language of flirtatious *marivaudage* – whose figurative use is also signaled typographically. Banter as "mock impoliteness" (Leech 2014:100) seems to be at play here, and it is relevant in the context, because Becky is trying to recreate a sense of intimacy with Rawdon and pacify him after failing to have him released from prison. Yet, the mock dysphemism does not fully translate into the love idiom, for it opens an additional territory, the teratological world of genuinely insulting discourse. This second interpretation is confirmed further down in the letter, when the word "monster" reappears with its British spelling and no italics in "my poor old monster" (1983:672), thus deprived of its amorous connotation to become plainly sarcastic. On the one hand, the fictional addressee, Rawdon, is encouraged to remain in the field of sentimental banter not to lose face, while on the other, Thackeray's reader, supported by prior knowledge of plot and characterization, is likely to opt for the other domain, that of polemical interpretation.

The existence of a three-place configuration is an encouragement to revisiting the previous example about the "Catherine Hayes" misfire in the early version of *Pendennis* (1994:1003). Since Hayes was an eighteenth-century murderess, who both existed in real-life and was featured in one of Thackeray's novels, it is plausible that the narrator, and through him the author, was not being ironical. Yet, given that Catherine Hayes was also a famous Dublin nineteenth-century singer, and Thackeray had a previous history of Irish-bashing, the ironic intent could not be entirely ruled out. In other words, Thackeray projects himself into two distinct narrators of two different texts, only one of them being ironical, and the reader then has to sort out the meaning. More interestingly, the Irish readership's interpretation has sedimented into the text and cannot be ignored by present-day readers, enlightened by critical notes in contemporary editions such as Sutherland's, which the present paper is using (1994:1053). In consequence, if Thackeray was not being ironical at all, then the Irish reader has finally turned into a commentator, whose input occupies the third structural place and who, thanks to the

posterity of his own version of the text, has become the ultimate narrator, in keeping with a radical approach to reception theory.

4. Conclusion

It is significant that the author insisted on his determination to take his readers for adults, even when composing in the satirical vein. Unlike children, readers are trusted to be capable of withstanding irony and reforming themselves, as is observed in the *Roundabout Papers*:

- (8) Have you ever tried the sarcastic or Socratic method with a child? Little simple he or she, in the innocence of the simple heart, plays some silly freak, or makes some absurd remark, which you turn to ridicule. The little creature dimly perceives that you are making fun of him, writhes, grows uneasy, bursts into tears, – upon my word it is not fair to try the weapon of ridicule upon that innocent young victim. (...) Point out his fault, and lay bare the dire consequence thereof: expose it roundly, and give him a proper, solemn, moral whipping – but do not attempt to *castigare ridendo*.
(1946:59)

True enough, straightforward “moral whipping” spares the readers the hardships of deciphering highly-encrypted narratives, and yet, the rhetoric of irony promotes reading – even recreational novel-reading – to the status of a rewardingly demanding activity. Because this interpretive work is always threatened by slackening attention, in other words entropy, systematic irony is also an answer to the necessity to stimulate and channel the reader's energy. Because artistic creativity is threatened by entropy as well, Thackeray uses his writings as a playground, not necessarily based on a cynical “universal-demolition principle,” as an anonymous reviewer of *Pendennis* complained in 1850 (1968:92), but with stylistic feats that prove challenging and creative for past, present, and probably future readers or critics. Not only does the Thackerayan approach shed light on the economy of reading, but the constant reshuffling of roles and places at work in his writings has also been shown to demonstrate the structural instability of irony.

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The point of banter in the television show *Pointless*

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This paper explores banter within the television quiz show *Pointless*. Building on previous theories of banter, I suggest that the composite nature of the phenomenon can usefully be analysed within an interactional pragmatic model, such as that proposed by Lecerle (1999). Using this model to analyse various episodes of *Pointless*, I seek to demonstrate that banter is created within a dynamic interpersonal process. I focus on the sequential interaction between speaker and the various hearers involved in the exchange, as opposed to isolated utterances. I propose that any analysis of banter needs not only to study the linguistic aspects of a series of utterances, but also the sociocultural context and the encyclopaedic knowledge that each participant brings to the exchange.

1. Introduction

The BBC quiz show, *Pointless*, owes part of its success to the banter between the two hosts – Alexander Armstrong who asks the questions and Richard Osman who explains the answers. Initially edited out from the first two series, the chat and banter were left in from series three onwards at the request of Armstrong, who felt that without it “all you were left with was a sort of terribly inept game show”.¹ Recognised by journalists and the public alike, the show’s banter provides a rich source of examples for study, even if a TV dialogue is not as natural as everyday conversation. Moreover, *Pointless* has run for over seven years and reached a thousand episodes, making it possible to analyse the banter as a dynamic evolving process, a sequence of turn-taking, rather than isolated exchanges, as was the case in early studies on politeness and impoliteness. The different episodes can also be contrasted and compared, making it easier to pinpoint any recurring forms that will help us identify banter.

1. <<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/jun/04/pointless-alexander-armstrong-richard-osman>>.

After examining existing theories and how they relate to mock impoliteness, I will suggest that these theories may be integrated within a pragmatic model of interpretation. The second part will test and expand this theoretical approach through a microanalysis of the banter in several episodes from *Pointless*.²

2. Defining banter

The term “banter” in English probably owes its origins to seventeenth century London slang. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb as meaning “to make fun of (a person); to hold up to ridicule (...). Now usually of good-humoured raillery”. However, the noun is defined as: “wanton nonsense talked in ridicule of a subject or person”, underlining that the object of banter need not necessarily be a person. The *Chambers 21st Dictionary* goes further, defining the noun as “light-hearted friendly talk” and the verb as “to tease someone or joke”.³ Some analyses of banter which situate it within a “jocular frame” are closer to the *Chambers* definition (cf. Dynel 2008:246).

The British English meaning of the term has varied over time and has recently become associated with offensive, inappropriate joking, even bullying.⁴ Various cases brought before employment tribunals have revealed the thin line that exists between banter in the workplace and verbal harassment. Scholars have therefore used different terms to distinguish between these serious meanings: “jocular mockery” and “jocular abuse” (Haugh & Bousfield 2012), “teasing” and “put-down humour” (Dynel 2008), or “aggressive” and “affiliative humour” (Martin et al. 2003). For Boxer and Cortés-Conde, teasing functions “on a continuum that ranges from bonding to nipping to biting” (1997:276).

While some analyses have examined this dual nature of banter in relation to the speaker’s intention, others underline the important role played by the reaction of the hearer and/or the presence of a third party (Dynel 2008). A jocular remark made to amuse a third party at the hearer’s expense is one way of identifying put-down humour or aggressive teasing (Dynel 2008:248).

Banter can therefore refer both to good-humoured mockery, even jocular talk, but also to unpleasant taunting, thereby underlining the role played by interpretation in identifying the phenomenon, and the need to establish a theoret-

2. The analysis draws on several episodes identified as banter by members of the public. The scripts were downloaded from subsaga.com and verified by watching the episodes.

3. <<http://chambers.co.uk>>.

4. <www.thetimes.co.uk/article/teacher-loses-job-over-ban-on-banter-n6ncppfcfxh>.

ical framework that considers all the participants within the process itself, not just the speaker (see Chapter 6 and 7 in the present volume).

3. Theories on banter

The starting place has invariably been existing theories of politeness and impoliteness, especially Leech's politeness model (1983) and Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies (1987) (see also Chapter 4 in the present volume).

Building on Goffman's notion of *face* ("the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact", Goffman 1967:5), Brown and Levinson elaborated a theoretical framework that presented politeness as a means of saving face or reducing potentially face-threatening acts (FTAs). This led Culpeper (1996) to posit that similar impoliteness strategies also occur. Impoliteness is the result of interaction between speaker and hearer and occurs when "(1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Culpeper 2005: 38; see also Chapter 10 in the present volume).

However, neither politeness nor impoliteness need necessarily be genuine. Leech's model of politeness includes what he calls "second-order principles" (1983:144–145), namely irony and banter, both of which feature forms that on the surface appear to be polite or impolite. When a speaker is ironic, s/he appears to be making a friendly inoffensive remark, yet they are in fact being impolite and therefore distancing themselves from their hearer. The use of banter, on the other hand, allows the speaker to say something which is offensive in jest. Leech concludes that the Irony Principle is a manifestation of mock politeness, while the Banter Principle belongs to the category of mock impoliteness. Thus, genuine impoliteness is hostile and aggressive, whereas mock impoliteness is "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence" (Culpeper 1996: 352).

Leech also argues that banter involves saying something that is false: "What *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue. Therefore, what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true" (Leech 1983:144). Consequently, both irony and banter flout one of Grice's conversational maxims, the Maxim of Quality (1975): "Do not say what you believe to be false".

However, the idea that banter, or more generally mock impoliteness, necessarily involves an untruth has been questioned (Haugh & Bousfield 2012; Mills 2003; Nowik 2005). Mock impoliteness "might actually be used, precisely because there is an element of truth in the utterance" (Mills 2003: 123) and banter, far from

focussing on some fictive element, may refer to an existing “trait, habit, or characteristic of the recipient of the banter” (Plester & Sayers 2007:159). This leads scholars such as Nowik to posit that Leech’s first condition “say something that is obviously untrue” should therefore be changed to “say something that (...) is obviously not serious” (2008:108). However, experimental research by Vergis (2015) suggests inferences derived from flouting the Maxim of Quality are indeed robust, even if other factors such as the speaker’s emotional state and face concerns also play a role (personal communication).

Saying something ostensibly offensive, in the knowledge that the hearer will not take offence, implies a close rapport between speaker and hearer. For Slugoski and Turnbull (1988), the relationship affect is all important in banter: it allows the hearer to interpret a counter-to-fact insult as a compliment. Contrary to irony, banter can therefore be “a signal of solidarity and camaraderie” (Leech 2014:239) indicating a close relationship with the hearer; it is a means of “establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity” (Leech 1983:144), and its intention is “to create and reinforce relationship through social acceptance-friendship strategies” (Plester & Sayers 2007:5). Culpeper describes banter as “mock impoliteness for social harmony” (1996:352), an idea expounded upon by Kisielewska-Krysiuk (2010) in her study on banter and phatic communication. She argues that the main role of both is to maintain social and interpersonal communication rather than impart information.

More recently, Haugh and Bousfield (2012) and Haugh (2015) suggest that rather than examining mock impoliteness within politeness/impoliteness theories, it is necessary to distinguish between mock impoliteness as an evaluation, and social actions, which include teasing, mockery and banter. They define mock impoliteness as “evaluations of talk or conduct that are potentially open to evaluation as impolite by at least one of the participants in an interaction, and/or as non-impolite by at least two participants” (2012:1103). The notion of “potentially open to evaluation” underlines again the important role played by interpretation, although I would suggest that it is not simply a case of evaluating a remark as being non-impolite, as the hearer may decide not to accept a remark as banter despite evaluating it as such. This possibility has often been neglected (Bousfield 2008:132–3), but is fully integrated into Lecerclé’s model.

All the approaches studied so far underline the importance of interpersonal relations, with a growing awareness among scholars that interpretation is an important factor in the identification of banter. The need to write contextual and co-textual factors into the equation has also been acknowledged (see Culpeper 2011 for a detailed analysis of this).

This leads me to suggest that these various theories are, in many ways, consistent with an interactional pragmatic framework, one which considers speaker, hearer, the linguistic strategies involved, and the context.

4. Banter within an interactional pragmatic framework

The model I wish to use is that proposed by Lecerclé (1999), itself a reformulation of Butler's theory of subjection and subjectivity (1997). My aim is not to reject classic pragmatic frameworks but to explore whether they can be integrated into this more general model of interactional pragmatics, and whether Lecerclé's multi-layered approach might provide a useful means for considering banter from a multi-angled perspective.

Lecerclé considers that there are five actants in a situation of communication: a speaker (A), a hearer (R), a message (T), an encyclopaedia (E) and language (L). It should be noted that Lecerclé is mainly concerned with written texts and he therefore uses the terms author, reader, and text for speaker, hearer, and message, respectively. In diagram form, this gives us (Lecerclé 1999: 75):

$$[A \leftarrow [L \rightarrow [T] \leftarrow E] \rightarrow R]$$

In the centre is the text (T) or message, the most important element in the process. It is produced by language (L) and the encyclopaedia (E). The term *encyclopaedia* is borrowed from Umberto Eco and refers to social institutions, shared knowledge and beliefs. It is therefore a mental model, an accumulation of experience which enables us to form a situation model (van Dijk & Kintsch 1983: 12). As such, it is a dynamic construct, capable of changing and developing as each new experience is added and assimilated. The author/speaker (A) and the reader/hearer (R) are effects of (T), as indicated by the outward pointing arrows, and "they play only a secondary part" (Lecerclé 1999: 152). The square brackets show that neither reader/hearer nor author/speaker entertains a direct relationship with the text, but each is "filtered" by language and the encyclopaedia, so that neither controls meaning. While previous research has presented the discourse level of banter as a one-way process with an arrow going from speaker to hearer (Bousfield 2007), and with the speaker often seemingly in control, Lecerclé's presentation allows for indirection, whereby the meaning of the text is separated from the author's meaning (thus allowing for misinterpretation) and varies with the conjuncture.

Both speaker and hearer are places within a structure, occupied by different subjects at different moments, hence the term *actant*, borrowed from Greimas (1966), to refer to all five sites in the diagram. In other words, Lecerclé underlines the importance of differentiating between people as actors, and the positions that

they occupy within this model. One advantage of Lecerle's model is that it does not focus on one specific actant to the detriment of the others.

To demonstrate how this model works in practice, and how it can offer a complementary approach to existing theories, I will use an extract from the beginning of an episode of *Pointless*. Armstrong is inviting the couples to introduce themselves by name and to say where they are from. I should perhaps point out that before *Pointless* Armstrong was best known for being one half of a comedy duo, "Armstrong and Miller", which first aired on television in 1997. As we will see in subsequent extracts, Osman constantly states that Miller is the more talented of the two and that another comedy duo, Mitchell and Webb, are funnier than either of them.

- (1) 1 ARMSTRONG: And couple number four?
 2 BLAKE: My name's Joshua Blake, this is my friend Jamie Laden
 3 – my legal advisor, carer and all-round good guy and we go to
 the University of Nottingham.
 4 ARMSTRONG: And these are today's contestants.
 5 Thanks, we'll get to know more about you throughout the
 show.
 6 That just leaves one more person for me to introduce, a man
 with a firm grasp of figures, but that's enough about the TV
 Quick Awards
 7 It's my *Pointless* friend, it's Richard.
 8 OSMAN: Hiya.
 9 OSMAN: Have you noticed that it happens sometimes...
 10 ARMSTRONG: Mm
 11 OSMAN: ...that we've got a character on the show?
 12 ARMSTRONG: Yes, I spotted that.
 13 OSMAN: Did you notice that?
 14 ARMSTRONG: I spotted that three-fold, all at once.
 15 OSMAN: Did you? What was the clue?
 16 ARMSTRONG: It was when Suzanne said that...
 17 OSMAN: No it was Blake...
 18 ARMSTRONG: ...who's actually called Joshua Blake. So, already ...
 19 OSMAN: He's got a surname for a name.
 20 ARMSTRONG: Yeah, literally his surname is the name he's gone for on his
 badge
 21 and he's wearing a hat.
 22 I thought it was enough that he was wearing red, to be honest,
 23 but there we are. It was good though, I liked his intro.
 24 OSMAN: It was very good, very strong. A lot to live up to the rest of the
 show.
 25 ARMSTRONG: Yeah.

- 26 OSMAN: Wouldn't want to be Blake/Joshua right about now.
27 That's a big start.
- 28 BLAKE: I'm sensing a bit of jealousy here.
29 Blake and Laden is the new Armstrong and Miller
30 and there's no denying it. The career starts here.
- 31 ARMSTRONG: OK. Oh-Kay!
- 32 OSMAN: I tell you what,
33 they've got the easy charm of an Armstrong and Miller,
 haven't they?
- 34 ARMSTRONG: Yeah.
- 35 OSMAN: I will give them that.
- 36 BLAKE: But we've also got the looks instead as well.
- 37 OSMAN: It's going terrifically well, isn't it?
- 38 ARMSTRONG: I don't...
39 Er, yes, it is going well.
- Series 10 Episode 17

Both speaker and hearer are interpellated, a term Lecerclé borrows from Althusser, or assigned a place within the overall framework (1999:152ff). By saying “Couple number four”, Armstrong names and identifies Blake and his partner (R) as contestants. He does so through an utterance (T) which is filtered through language (L) (he chooses the appropriate term for addressing the two) in accordance with his understanding of the context (E) (a quiz show). Joshua (R) is thus interpellated, captured at a place by language (L). By imposing a role or giving a name to Joshua, Armstrong gives him an identity (1999:164). At the same time, Armstrong is himself interpellated through language and assigned the place of host. “Positioned as both addressed and addressing, [...] the subject is not only founded by the other, requiring an address in order to be, but its power is derived from the structure of address as both linguistic vulnerability and exercise” (Butler 1997:30).

However, interpellation is an on-going process and it is not one-way (Lecerclé 1999:185). The hearer is free to refuse the identity that is imposed and, in this example, Joshua does indeed refuse the position he is ascribed. As Lecerclé points out, counter-interpellation is always a possibility.⁵ The representation that Joshua has of himself does not match the one constructed by Armstrong. Instead of giving the expected reply, Joshua first presents Jamie as “his legal advisor, carer and all-round good guy” (3), and only incidentally does he mention that he and his partner go to the University of Nottingham. Grice's conversational maxims (1975)

5. “the interpellated reader, although subjected as much as subjectified, is not powerless. She sends back the force of interpellation as Perseus's shield, held as a mirror, sent back the Gorgon's gaze and petrified her.” (Lecerclé 1999:116).

can be integrated here. By giving too much information about himself and his team member, Joshua flouts the Maxim of Quantity. But he also flouts the Maxim of Quality, as the relationship he describes between himself and Jamie cannot be true: the various professions enumerated are almost mutually exclusive. Not only does Joshua refuse the representation that Armstrong initially has of him as a contestant, he interpellates Armstrong in turn, usurping Armstrong's role and mimicking him by introducing Jamie in terms that echo Armstrong's typical introduction of Osman at the start of every show. Joshua's behaviour can be evaluated as impolite here, as it contains a threat to Armstrong's Social Identity face,⁶ the representation that Armstrong has of his social role as quiz host (Spencer-Oatey 2000). However, the studio audience's laughter and Osman and Armstrong's smiles signal that this FTA is not to be taken seriously. Filtered through language (L) (the flouting of Grice's maxims) and the encyclopaedia (the type of quiz show etc.), Joshua's utterance (T) is evaluated as jocular mockery (Haugh 2010).⁷

Consequently, Osman and Armstrong have to adjust their representation of Joshua (he is clearly no ordinary contestant) and their representation of themselves (Lecerclé 1999:68). The necessity to adjust one's initial conceptions in the course of an interchange has also been pointed out by Spencer-Oatey (2008: 39–40). Armstrong and Osman proceed with an attack on Joshua's Social Identity face, mocking his name and attire (20–22), thus offering a negative assessment of the contestant (Haugh 2015).

Their FTA is strengthened by Joshua being the object of their discourse, the third party, or unaddressed ratified hearer (Dynel 2010b). However, filtered through language (L) and the encyclopaedia (E), the duo's remarks cannot be taken at face value. The reference to Joshua's attire remains impersonal. No pejorative adjectives are used; there is nothing in the vein of "Did you see that ridiculous hat he's wearing?" The implicature is not that Joshua has no dress sense or looks ridiculous, but that he has chosen to stand out from the crowd, that he is a "character". Moreover, Armstrong's "I liked his intro" enhances Joshua's positive face. The FTAs are therefore not to be taken seriously and instead of impoliteness we have banter.⁸

6. Social Identity Face is defined by Spencer-Oatey as "a fundamental desire for people to acknowledge and uphold our social identities or roles, e. g., as group leader, valued customer, close friend." (2000: 14).

7. "a complex array of (non-)verbal acts whereby the speaker somehow diminishes something of relevance to self, other, or a third-party who is not co-present, but does so in a non-serious or jocular frame." (Haugh 2010: 2108).

8. There are other reasons why this sequence may be interpreted as banter, including the hearers' encyclopaedia, a point analysed later in this chapter.

Osman then makes another potential FTA (26), the implicature being that Joshua will not be so confident or so impressive when it comes to answering the questions. Osman is thus reasserting the representation he has of himself as quizmaster and the person in charge. As Osman is therefore in a position of power, the potential for impoliteness is reinforced (Locher & Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 1996).

Instead of accepting the role he is assigned, that of third party, Joshua again reverses the usual host-contestant relationship by speaking when he hasn't been addressed. Once again, we have counter-interpellation and Joshua places himself on an equal footing with the two hosts. He then proceeds to banter with the two hosts, drawing on his knowledge (encyclopaedia) of previous subjects of banter, namely Armstrong's comic partnership with Ben Miller (29; 36) and usurping Osman's role, for it is Osman who usually introduces the topic of Armstrong and Miller. Not content with that, Joshua even offers his own FTA by implying that Armstrong and Miller are not good-looking (36).

From the above, we can conclude that FTAs arise when there is a difference either between the speaker's representation of the hearer (R) and the hearer's representation of themselves or between the hearer's representation of the speaker (A) and the speaker's representation of themselves. However, if either the speaker or hearer accept the other's representation then the FTA is mitigated.

Banter is thus created as the exchange between speaker and hearer progresses; the relationship between speaker and hearer is a dynamic process and may affect the interpretation of the message (Fisher & Adams 1994:18).

Having examined how Lecerclé's model may work in practice, I wish now to examine the various actants in more detail, in order to identify how banter works in *Pointless*.

5. Banter and *Pointless*

Initially launched on BBC 2 in 2009, the increasingly popular quiz show *Pointless* is now followed by an average of 3.6 million viewers on its daily evening slot on BBC 1. There is even a spin-off, *Pointless Celebrities*, broadcast every Saturday evening during prime time. Each episode involves four pairs of contestants who must give a correct answer while scoring as few points as possible. Before the show, the questions are given to a panel of one hundred people who have one hundred seconds to find as many answers as possible. The contestants' score corresponds to the number of people on the panel who have given the same answer. A pointless answer is one that no member of the panel thought of, and adds £250 to the jackpot. In the final round, a pointless answer wins the jackpot.

6. The actants in the process of banter

6.1 Interaction between speaker(s) and hearer(s)

As stated above, banter is often considered to take place between intimates (Culpeper 2011:209). Friends since Cambridge, Armstrong and Osman act out their friendship on screen. Armstrong always introduces Osman as “my pointless friend”, and the two exchange remarks during the show on personal details and preferences, revealing that they know several facts about each other’s lives. Furthermore, they frequently indulge in a form of humorous verbal exchange or conjoint humour (Holmes 2006) which has nothing to do with the questions, thus creating an image of two people who enjoy a good rapport based on shared knowledge and experience or, encyclopaedia. This collaborative humour can lead to the creation of an elaborate fictional situation, or joint fantasizing (Kotthoff 2007), as illustrated by the following episode from series 5. The two competing pairs of contestants (Dee and Colin & Pat and Tony) are asked to name a Sebastian Faulks novel. As neither team of contestants can do so, they invent fictive titles: *A Day at the Seaside* and *Murder*:

- (2) 1 ARMSTRONG: *A Day at the Seaside* and *Murder* (Laughter) Oh – Kay.
 2 So, Dee and Colin, *A Day at the Seaside* by Sebastian Faulks.
 3 Let’s see if that’s right and if it is, let’s see how many people
 thought that was right.
 4 No. What about *Murder* by Sebastian Faulks?
 5 Let’s see if that’s right and if it is, let’s see how many people
 said it.
 6 PAT: Congratulations.
 7 TONY: We’re as good as each other!
 8 ARMSTRONG: After two questions, Pat and Tony still up one-nil. Richard?
 9 OSMAN: Yeah. Poor old Sebastian Faulks, sitting at home, with a nice
 cup of tea, thinking, “Ah I like Pointless.”
 10 ARMSTRONG: I’ll tell you what I’ll have a little break from my new, what is
 it... my seventh novel
 11 OSMAN: Eleventh novel
 12 ARMSTRONG: Eleventh novel! I’ll just settle down and watch a little bit of
 Pointless.
 13 OSMAN: The whole family are sort of upstairs doing things ... and he
 says “Everyone – Everyone.” Presses pause.
 14 ARMSTRONG: Quick! Quick! It’s me on Pointless.
 15 OSMAN: They’re doing me on Pointless! They’re doing me on Pointless.
 16 They’re gonna guess my novels.
 17 I wonder what they’re gonna say.
 18 Which of my novels do they like the best, I wonder?

- 19 ARMSTRONG: Mmm... maybe.
- 20 OSMAN: The whole family coming down the stairs
(imitates noise and movement with hands). What is it Dad?
What is it Dad?
- 21 ARMSTRONG: What is it? What is it?
- 22 OSMAN: They're doing me on *Pointless*!
- 23 ARMSTRONG: You're on *Pointless* today! Quick! Dad's on *Pointless*!
- 24 OSMAN: Quick!
- 25 ARMSTRONG: Quick!
- 26 OSMAN: Fifteen of the Faulks clan now all sitting on sofas.
- 27 He's just pressing un-pause there. He's on live replay.
- 28 ARMSTRONG: OK
- 29 OSMAN: Everybody. Right, everyone now, absolute quiet.
- 30 Ssh! Dim the lights! Pull the curtains, dim the lights.
- 31 'Cause there's a reflection on the screen
- 32 ARMSTRONG: No, quickly! Ring everyone we know!"
- 33 OSMAN: There's a reflection on the screen. I can't see Tony.
- 34 I can't see Tony's face when he's going to say my novel. (Pause)
- 35 And then ... look what you did!
- 36 COLIN: Rub it in a bit more!
- 37 TONY: I thought he played for Man United!
- 38 COLIN: Midfielder, yeah. He's good.
- 39 OSMAN: That's not helping! You're thinking of Sebastian Veron!
- Series 5 Episode 57

For this exchange to be fast and funny, both speaker and hearer need to understand how each other's mind works. By correctly representing each other's language and encyclopaedia, they can quickly elaborate on what the other has just said, taking turns to pretend they are part of Faulks family (23) or Faulks himself (22). The end of the sequence is signalled by Osman's *And then look what you did* (35), which is significantly slower with each word accentuated, thus contrasting with the previous fast pace and animated exchange.

This conjoint humour will form part of the audience's encyclopaedia (E) regarding the relationship between the hosts, and subsequent text (T) will be filtered through this, influencing how potentially impolite remarks are interpreted.

Whether this exchange can be labelled banter will depend, in part, on the theoretical framework being used (Dynel & Sinkeviciute 2017). It certainly corresponds to Norrick's rather broad definition of banter as a "rapid exchange of humorous lines oriented towards a common theme, though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk" (1993:29) or Dynel's "match of verbal ping-pong played by two (or more) interlocutors within a jocular mode" (2008:243–244). For one viewer, there is no doubt: "Ah the Sebastian Faulks round, the day I realised just how much I loved and enjoyed Richard and Xander's

banter.”⁹ This episode also closely resembles others to be found on the BBC website under the heading “banter”,¹⁰ where the humour is not directed at someone, but is centred on a topic, thus diminishing any likelihood of an FTA.

Nevertheless, in example (2), the humour can arguably be evaluated as impolite because it threatens the contestants’ Social Identity face. Faulk’s imagined disappointment is the direct result of their ignorance (35). Yet, the implicit ridicule is directed less at the contestants’ errors or ignorance than at the imagined anti-climax experienced by Sebastian Faulk. The jocular frame (Haugh 2010) enables the contestants to join in the banter: they wave to the imaginary Faulks family watching the programme and even pretend further ignorance by identifying Faulks as a football player (37). The good-natured humour is in sharp contrast with Anne Robinson’s more aggressive tactics (Culpeper 2005), and will be re-examined later.

6.2 From dyadic relations to multiple participants

In example (2), multiple participants are involved (Dynel 2011b). As Goffman states: “when a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it” (1981:3). There are various kinds of possible hearers: eavesdroppers who overhear; ratified participants who are not addressed by the speaker; and finally, ratified participants who are indeed addressed by the speaker and who are expected to reply in some way (Goffman 1981:9). In my examples, no exchange is ever simply between Armstrong and Osman, as the contestants, the studio audience, and the TV viewer are also being addressed. This is quite clear in the way both Armstrong and Osman directly address the cameras and the way the cameras also move towards the studio audience to show them laughing. Significantly, in the first two series, where the banter was edited out, the cameras were fixed and did not move, so that the jokes were missed as the camera was not necessarily on the right person. Once the cameras were trained on all the participants, the result was radically different, and it was possible to focus on the source of the banter and the hearer’s reactions.¹¹ Lecerclé’s choice of the term *actant* underlines that the hearer’s place is a “role”, not a specific person, thus allowing multiple levels of speakers and hearers to be included, with the speaker interpellating the hearer and inherently ratifying the hearer (Dynel 2012: 169–170).

9. <<https://www.boards.ie/b/thread/2056811805/32?>>.

10. See for example <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01pqz2x](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01pqz2x>)>, series 6, Fishing banter; or <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p013c1b3](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p013c1b3>)> series 8, episode 5, Age banter.

11. <[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2718829/Pointless-Its-turned-lives-upside-Alexander-Armstrong-Richard-Osman-like-catapulted-stardom.html#ixzz3qeBWx81f](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2718829/Pointless-Its-turned-lives-upside-Alexander-Armstrong-Richard-Osman-like-catapulted-stardom.html#ixzz3qeBWx81f>)>.

In *Pointless*, the studio audience rarely replies verbally, even though Osman may address them directly. However, they are ratified to react and their audible laughter, their endorsement of the banter, is also communicated visually when the camera switches to focus on them, so that arguably a different role can be identified for the studio audience, that of recipient: ratified hearers who are not conversationalists (Dynel 2011a).

Example (3) illustrates the dynamic role played by the studio audience within the participation framework, potentially influencing how the television viewer may interpret an utterance:

- (3) 1 ARMSTRONG: Alan. Now then, tell me a little bit...
 2 Before I ask Alan anything, Alan said to me before the show,
 he just said in his Liverpool accent, he just said "I know
 where you live, so no funny stuff?"
 3 OSMAN: Did he really?
 4 ARMSTRONG: Yeah!
 5 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE:
 6 OSMAN: That's cos I gave him your address.
 7 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE:
 8 ARMSTRONG: Ah.
 9 OSMAN: But you're not known for funny stuff, are you?
 10 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE
 and
 ARMSTRONG:
 11 ARMSTRONG: No!
 12 OSMAN to Alan: You're thinking of Ben Miller.
 13 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE:
 14 ALAN: That's the one.
 15 He's good.
 16 OSMAN: Oh, he is ...he's... Do you know what?
 17 That *Death In Paradise* he does is terrific.
 18 It's really good. It's like a weight has been lifted from him
 (pause) seeing him on that show.
 19 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE
 and
 ARMSTRONG:
 20 OSMAN But you realise the brake that's been put on him for so many
 years.

- 21 STUDIO Laughter. Aw!
 AUDIENCE:
 22 ARMSTRONG: Oh that's the first time I've ever had sympathy. Oh, Richard.
 23 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE
 and
 ARMSTRONG:
 24 OSMAN: One day I'll push it too far.
 25 No, you're OK. You're OK.
 26 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE
 and
 ARMSTRONG:
 27 OSMAN: But, but, he is better, he is better.
 28 STUDIO Laughter
 AUDIENCE:
 Series 9, Episode 16

In this example, the exchange between Armstrong and Osman also includes participation from a contestant, Alan. Armstrong mentions that Alan “knows where he lives”, the implicature being that Armstrong’s life and safety will be in danger should he make one false move. By referring to Alan’s Liverpool accent, by suggesting that it indicates Alan’s belonging to some kind of criminal lowlife and is also socially undesirable, Armstrong makes a potential FTA on Alan’s Social Identity face. The FTA is strengthened by the fact that Armstrong, with his RP accent and private-school education, belongs to the dominant social class, and is therefore in a position of power (Culpeper 2008:39). Armstrong’s representation of Alan interpellates Alan into a place that is probably not one that Alan would desire, and so can be considered a FTA. However, Alan’s gangster-style threat is exaggerated and out of keeping with the given frame of a family quiz show. It does not correspond to the audience’s encyclopaedia (for a more detailed analysis of mismatches between what is said and done and the context see Culpeper 2011), and the exaggeration creates a jocular frame. Moreover, unlike Anne Robinson on *The Weakest Link*, who contemptuously mimics the contestants’ accents (Culpeper 2011:176), Armstrong, a first-class mimic, does not actually caricaturise Alan’s accent. Finally, Alan’s reaction is to laugh, thereby indicating he never intended any threat and that he is not offended either.

Osman then uses the phrase “no funny stuff” in its literal meaning (9), to start his running joke about Armstrong’s comedy partner, Ben Miller, being the more talented of the two. He starts with a closed question (9), a direct address to Armstrong with the use of the second person pronoun, and instead of saying he personally prefers Miller, he uses the passive voice implying this is a shared

opinion. The closed question, asked with a falling pitch, interpellates Armstrong and prevents him from controlling the discourse: the required response is “no”. Unlike Osman’s previous banter, this opening line is bald-on-record impoliteness (Culpeper 2011), but can also be interpreted as banter based on what we know of previous exchanges and the hearer(s) reactions i.e. based on our encyclopaedia. Osman then proceeds to exclude Armstrong from the speaker-hearer relationship by addressing the contestant (12). Finally, Osman uses off-record impoliteness: the damage to Armstrong’s face is performed through a series of implicatures so that even if Osman’s intention is clear, it can be denied (Culpeper 2011). Firstly, Osman praises Miller (17), the implicature being that he is the truly comic partner. Then he talks about a weight having been lifted (18) and a brake removed since Miller went solo (18; 20), the implicature being that Armstrong was the weight and brake. Osman’s remarks generate not only laughter from the audience but also a sympathetic “aw”. The banter this time is close to being too antagonistic, a fact that Osman himself recognises (24). The dynamic role of the studio audience is enhanced by the camera moving to focus on them (19; 26) and arguably, if the audience were not shown and heard laughing, this would be a case of put-down humour as opposed to banter. The speaker can never fully control how his or her message is interpreted since language itself is “inherently vague” (Lecercle 1999:76–7). As Holmes and Schnurr (2005:122) remark, “perhaps we can never be totally confident about the ascription of politeness or impoliteness to particular utterances”. Whether the hearer (in this case Armstrong) accepts the speaker’s representation of him, will influence how the studio audience and television viewer view the exchange and whether they label it as banter or not.

6.3 Reacting to banter

In example (4), Osman draws a parallel between Hans Christian Andersen and Armstrong, through their similar reaction to bad reviews. He uses the same terms: “sobbing uncontrollably” (5;8). Anderson outstayed his welcome at Dickens’ (3) and the implicature of “literally a month later you’re still there” (8) is that Armstrong was no longer welcome at Osman’s. Osman indicates that Armstrong’s reviews contrast unfavourably with those of his partner and that even Armstrong’s appearance was criticised (14;16). All these remarks, which attack Armstrong’s Social Identity face, could be evaluated as impolite.

- (4) 1 OSMAN: Born in 1805, Hans Christian Andersen.
 2 Once went to stay with Charles Dickens and stayed for five weeks
 3 Dickens couldn’t get rid of him.
 4 ARMSTRONG: Oh yes, that’s right

- 5 OSMAN: He used to sob uncontrollably every time he read a review.
 6 He's a bit like you.
 7 Do you remember that ... no, cos do you remember that time
 you came to my house for tea?
 8 And, literally, a month later, you're still there, - sobbing
 uncontrollably at your reviews
 9 ARMSTRONG: Crying into the cake.
 10 OSMAN: Every single one of them just scathing.
 11 ARMSTRONG: Terrible.
 12 OSMAN: Some of them were nice about Ben Miller, weren't they?
 13 Some of them said Ben is good.
 14 But all of them, to a man, just brutal about your performance,
 15 ARMSTRONG: It was h...
 16 OSMAN: your appearance. Everything.
 17 ARMSTRONG: Oh God, I'm welling up again now, Richard. Get me a cake!
 18 Oh no, it's fine. It's fine.
 19 OSMAN: I just say, "Thank the Lord for voiceover work!"
- Series 6 Episode 13

Banter is, of course, generated in part through Osman's referring to a situation which is evidently false. It is highly unlikely that Armstrong turned up at Osman's house for tea and then stayed a month. Osman's remark therefore belongs to the category of mixed messages, i.e. "mismatching *interpersonal* messages in interaction that are incongruous on at least one level of interpretation or generate a sense of interpretive or evaluative dissonance" (Culpeper, Haugh & Kádár 2017:324). Within Lecerclé's framework there is a discrepancy between the utterance and the hearer's encyclopaedia. There are also linguistic cues that signal this is a "non-serious or jocular frame" (Haugh & Bousfield 2012:1108) and these will be investigated in subsection 6:4. It is the hearer's reactions that I wish to focus on here and how they inform the audience that these remarks are to be interpreted as banter.

According to Haugh (2010), the target of jocular mockery, or, in this case, banter, can respond in one of three ways: he can ignore the remark, reject it as untrue by explicitly saying so, or he can accept it. Within the context of this particular quiz show, the first two reactions are unlikely and indeed Armstrong never has recourse to them. Instead, in this example, he upholds Osman's remarks. In example (2), we saw how in conjoint humour both hosts elaborate and echo each other's utterances. Here, it is a one-way process with Armstrong collaborating, reformulating and therefore agreeing with what Osman says. Osman's *sobbing uncontrollably at your reviews* (8) is rephrased by Armstrong as *crying into the cake* (9) and Osman's *scathing* (10) is reformulated by Armstrong as *terrible* (11). Armstrong, therefore, accepts Osman's representation of him and Osman's representation of himself by echoing Osman and even topping Osman's remarks. He

adopts the hypothetical identity he is given (Heerey et al. 2005:56) or, in Lecerle's terms, the place to which he is interpellated. He does not seek to take control of the exchange but participates in Osman's make-believe account. Armstrong's replies allow both Osman and the audience as hearer(s), to interpret Armstrong as not being offended, which is considered to be the preferred reaction (Sinkeviciute 2017:17).

As a performance technique, Armstrong's participation here enables him to present himself in a positive light. Being "able to poke fun at one's own foibles, incapacities and misadventures, the speaker comes over as a quick-witted, and consequently likeable person" (Dynel 2010a:192; see also Goddard 2009). The ability to laugh at oneself is generally recognized as a social attribute, illustrating the British reluctance "to take things too seriously" (Fox 2004:36). Osman's remarks also allow Armstrong to indulge in self-deprecation, another characteristic of Englishness (Fox 2004:212; Sinkeviciute 2014). By enabling Armstrong to indulge in self-deprecation and self-mockery, Osman's ostensibly FTA serves to enhance Armstrong's public self-image or positive face, allowing him to present himself as an affable man who does not take himself seriously. How then does Armstrong interpret Osman's remarks as being banter and not face-threatening? This is where the other two actants, language and encyclopaedia, play an important role.

6.4 Language and encyclopaedia

There are arguably no single linguistic forms that are unequivocally proof of banter, although Terkourafi (2008:67) does suggest that "some expressions may be conventionalised to express face-threat". However, the idea that particular expressions are associated in one's mind with particular contexts resonates with other work, notably Gumperz's notion of contextualisation cues (1982). More recent research (Haugh 2010; Culpeper 2011; Haugh & Bousfield 2012) has drawn attention to certain conventionalised formulae being used to signal the presence of banter. Among these are "lexical exaggeration, formulaicity, topic shift markers, contrastiveness, prosodic cues, inviting laughter, and facial or gestural cues" (Haugh 2010:2108). These formulae are present in the previous examples to varying degrees. In example (3), Osman uses the topic shift marker "but" to mark the beginning of the banter: "But you're not known for funny stuff" and, as we saw earlier, in example 2, a prosodic cue marks the end of the banter episode. The form I wish to focus on here is lexical exaggeration, in the form of hyperbole and extreme case formulations, which is present in all the preceding examples.

As Leech points out, "hyperbole refers to a case where the speaker's description is stronger than is warranted by the state of affairs described" (1983:145). In

example (4), Osman does not just refer to one single review or one specific critic but to *every single one* (10) and *all of them, to a man* (14). Armstrong does not just cry, he sobs uncontrollably. Hyperbole thus flouts Grice's Maxims of Quality and Quantity, since it distorts the truth and provides an excess of information. Extreme case formulations (ECFs) are a subcategory of hyperbole.¹² They also involve overstatement but they are extreme expressions at the far end of the scale (Norrick 2004). In example (2) we find: *whole* (20), *all* (26), *every* (29; 32), and *absolute* (29). Repetition also creates intensity and provides an excess of information, leading the hearer to suspect that what is being said is not credible. In example (2), exaggeration is created by a movement along a scale, as the imagined scene describes first the individual, Faulks, then *the whole family* (20), and finally *fifteen of the Faulks clan* (26). All these linguistic forms signal the flouting of the Maxim of Quantity, and to a lesser extent the Maxim of Quality.¹³ Example (5) is a little different as no fictional scene is created. The contestants have been given clues to pairs of people sharing the same name. The contestant, Shalini, has just correctly identified the name of David Mitchell from the clue "*Cloud Atlas* and *Peepshow* star"

- (5) 1 OSMAN: David Mitchell and Robert Webb – do you ever watch that?
 2 ARMSTRONG: I do, yeah
 3 OSMAN: Cos you do a double act, don't you?
 4 Yours is Armstrong and Miller, is that right?
 5 ARMSTRONG: That's ... Yes that's right Richard. Yep ... Yeah
 6 OSMAN: No ... I'm a... very, very big fan of Mitchell and Webb.
 7 You know you've done slightly more (*pause*) obvious (*pause*)
 stuff.
 8 But you know what I mean, that slightly toilet humour-y stuff
 9 Actually Ben Miller not so much, but you, very much.
 10 Whereas I think Mitchell and Webb, especially David
 Mitchell, they're quite clever, they're cleverer
 11 ARMSTRONG: Yes, Cerebral. Cerebral.
 12 OSMAN: I'm so sorry, this isn't... I'm not quite getting this across right.
 13 Cos they are funnier than you.
 14 No. cause they're funnier than you (repeats?) but also cleverer.
 15 Do you know what I mean?
 16 ARMSTRONG: No I do. I do. I see what you're saying. They're very clever

12. Hyperbole can be defined as "overt and blatant exaggeration of some characteristic or property" (Carston & Wearing 2015: 80), while ECFs are a subcategory of hyperbole (Edwards 2000) and "make claims involving end points on scales" (Norrick 2004: 1729).

13. Norrick argues that "non-extreme hyperboles are overstated rather than clearly false" (2004: 1735).

- 17 OSMAN: Yeah. They're very clever.
 18 They write a lot of their own stuff as well which I think you and Ben do as well, which I think may be your mistake.
 19 AUDIENCE: Laughter
 20 ARMSTRONG: Very good. Thanks very much, Richard. Now then, Marti Series 6 Episode 56

Osman uses the answer to explain why he prefers the comedy act Mitchell and Webb to Armstrong and Miller. He gives a negative assessment of Armstrong as a comic, casting him “into a valenced category that is undesirable, objectionable or disagreeable” (Haugh 2015:280). However, he rephrases the point in so many ways that his explicit meta-comment, *I'm not getting this across right* (12) is absurd, and what is a potentially Social Identity FTA (Armstrong is not funny) cannot be taken seriously. In terms of linguistic cues (L), it is the over-use of repetition accompanied by heightened intensity that again signals the non-seriousness of his remarks: from *quite clever* (10) we move to *cleverer* (10) and *very clever* (17). Grice's Maxims of Quality and Quantity are both flouted; Quality because Osman's repetition leads us to think his statements are not credible and Quantity because the repetition provides an excess of information and his protestation (12) cannot be believed.

This example also contains non-verbal modalities of communication (Joly and O'Kelly 1989: 32) that are important cues. Osman uses pauses (7) to highlight certain words, thus adding to the hyperbole. Moreover, his tone of voice tends to be deadpan, and this prosodic feature has been recognised as making irony seem less insulting and funnier than a more sarcastic intonation (Martin 2007:246, Dews & Winner 1997: 392). Finally, within the context of the game show, Osman's behaviour here is deviant. Osman's television persona is that of the knowledgeable quizmaster, always fully in possession of the facts. Here, however, he makes an assertion and asks for confirmation (3). He flouts the Maxim of Quality since he cannot not be in possession of that knowledge, and the question is simply a preface, a means of introducing Armstrong's double act and establishing him as part of a partnership, which is then contrasted unfavourably with Mitchell and Webb. This is then taken a step further as Armstrong is compared unfavourably with his partner Ben Miller.

The non-verbal modalities of communication used by Armstrong, as recipient or hearer, are equally important cues (Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff 1987; Haugh 2010). Unlike previous examples of collaborative humour, Armstrong responds less with witty repartees than with smiles, a typical non-verbal response to teases (Drew 1987), and with the occasional “yeah”, which encourages Osman to continue. Both visual and verbal clues inform the studio and TV audience that the exchange is not to be taken seriously. The actant “language” in Lecerclé's model

therefore needs to refer to an inclusive view of language. Following Joly and O’Kelly (1989), I would argue all the various modalities of communication, verbal and non-verbal, need to be included at (L). Body language and prosody, or expressivity, are just as important in constructing meaning, as are lexis and grammar, or expression (see too Culpeper 2011).

But the hearer(s) also judge(s) an exchange to be banter through their encyclopaedic knowledge. While earlier studies on politeness and impoliteness focussed on exchanges out of context, to truly understand banter we need to include context within the theoretical framework (see Culpeper 2011). The context is both created by banter but also creates it. In Lecerclé’s framework, this context is present in the actant E, encyclopaedic knowledge, and can include the notion of norms (Culpeper 2008:30) and frames (Terkourafi 2001). The examples analysed here contain recurrent features that create situational and co-textual norms. The topic of Osman’s preference for Ben Miller has become almost ritualised (Radcliffe-Brown 1940) so that, as soon as Osman mentions Ben Miller, Armstrong and the audience guess what will come next. One of the reasons that various contestants can successfully join in the mocking of Armstrong as a comic is because this has become an established routine within the programme. There is also the fact that the camaraderie between the two hosts has been established since the beginning of the series. It is therefore unlikely that Osman is seriously criticizing Armstrong’s talent as a comic. Moreover, as we saw earlier, *Pointless* is not exploitative entertainment in the style of *The Weakest Link* (Culpeper 2005). The nearest Armstrong comes to suggesting a contestant’s answer is wide of the mark is an elongated variant of Okay (Oh Kay!) pronounced with a high fall, but there is no sarcasm. Within the frame of a friendly quiz show, any impoliteness is less likely to be taken seriously.

7. Conclusion

This study has sought to analyse banter within an interactional pragmatic framework. The first part of this chapter examined British English definitions and previous scholarly research. In the second part, Lecerclé’s interactional pragmatic model, ALTER, was introduced and used to analyse an episode from the BBC quiz show *Pointless*. The third part, Section 6, studied various episodes from the show and sought to demonstrate how banter was created, and also to demonstrate how Lecerclé’s model, with its five components, could offer a useful complementary framework for existing theories.

The definitions and the examples studied revealed that the concept is complex. Banter was shown to be a potentially ambiguous verbal exchange, created in an

interaction between various participants. Lecercle's framework underlines that interpretation is continually being negotiated, allowing us to account for the idea that neither banter nor Face are fixed stable phenomena but constantly evolving and changing as the various elements within the framework change and evolve. Moreover, the utterance meaning is always separated from the speaker's original meaning. Thus, an utterance (in this case banter) can be interpreted differently by the various participants in a conversation depending on how they assess the linguistic content, but also in relation to the prosodic and gestural cues, or in relation to their encyclopaedia. The importance of prosodic and gestural cues in banter highlights the need to adjust Lecercle's actant "language" (L) to include non-verbal modes of communication. Each participant's interpretation will depend on their knowledge of each other and of previous exchanges, and will be negotiated in interaction. The presence of the actant encyclopaedia (E), which can include much recent research on framing, also enables us to consider cultural scripts. When the utterance does not correspond to the hearer's encyclopaedia (E) or language (L), we have a mismatch (Culpeper 2011), which paves the way for possible banter.

One of the advantages of Lecercle's model, then, is that it can include a range of theoretical approaches, while at the same time demonstrating the intricacy of the exchange and the necessity of including all five actants, rather than focussing on one to the detriment of the others. The framework enables us to examine banter, and more importantly impoliteness and politeness phenomena, from various places within the structure.

Finally, the more general framework afforded by Lecercle's model allows various possible evaluations of banter including ones that do not sit so neatly within a mock impoliteness analysis. Following Locher (2015), I would argue that a multi-angled approach is a "worthy tradition that should be continued", and a multi-layered approach, such as Lecercle's model, underlines the complexity of banter.

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Irony as counter positioning

Reader comments on the EU migrant crisis

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This chapter examines how ironic utterances in online news forums are used for the purpose of collective positioning of the commenting readers in opposition to other groups. Approaching irony as an act of echoic interpretation, the analysis focuses on how readers echo both the representations made by the media texts and the beliefs and ideologies presumed to be held by other social actors. It is argued that through irony, readers express their oppositional attitudes, disaffiliating themselves from the ironized social actors and their real or assumed representations. Simultaneously, ironists enforce their own opinions and standpoints, which are not just personal but – as argued in the paper – representative of a larger group to which the commenter belongs. By tracing how irony is used in reader comments to delegitimize dissonant views and emphasize contrastive self-positioning, this paper seeks to extend the application of an interactional pragmatic approach to irony by adding a critical discourse analytical dimension to it.

1. Introduction

Irony is one of those topics that have been subject to extensive research in linguistics, with a broad range of definitions and a multitude of approaches. In pragmatics, several research traditions are generally distinguished, including (neo-)Gricean, relevance-theoretical and pretence approaches, which are all well documented in the literature (see Attardo 2001; Dynel 2014, 2017). In this chapter, I pursue a more specific question of how irony can be used to delegitimize views that the ironist does not agree with, and to construct a positive view of one's own in-group in opposition to some other group. The aim, thus, is to probe the ultimate communicative goals of the ironists that involve their collective self-positioning with respect to not only current political issues but also variously defined out-groups of the 'other'. To this end, I will apply a combined critical prag-

matic approach that appears best suited for exploring how readers in online comments construct irony in a responsive manner, i.e. through echoic mention, and how this kind of irony is related to the ironists' self-positioning.

This chapter applies the conception of verbal irony as an echoic mention (Wilson 2006), along the lines of some recent research into media discourse from the point of view of interactional pragmatics (Weizman 2008; Livnat & Dori-Haconen 2013; Johansson 2015. See also Chapter 8 in the present volume). In this view, irony concerns the echoic mention of previous acts, which are either "explicit (a prior utterance) or implicit (presumed thought, belief, state of mind), true or imagined" (Weizman 2015: 173). It operates with the clash between the literal and the implied meanings. At the same time, it is based on the mechanism of an evaluative reversal (Partington 2006) along the good/bad dimension, though the actual situation may be more complex, involving a continuum of positive, negative and neutral evaluation (Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014). As noted by Burgers et al. (2011: 189), most theorists agree on several basic aspects: not only is irony implicit and evaluative, but an ironic utterance may also be read either ironically or non-ironically (i.e., literally). Also, there is some oppositeness – or at least discrepancy – between the literal (non-ironic) and the non-literal (ironic) readings that can be perceived, leading to evaluative reversal.

My approach is grounded in interactional pragmatics by focusing on the social functions of irony (Clift 1999; Kotthoff 2003). These involve aggression, evaluation, verbal play, but also in-group and out-group definition and others (Attardo 2006: 27). Since irony has a specific target, it has been widely approached as a strategy for building up group solidarity (Kotthoff 2003; Weizman 2013; Livnat & Dori-Haconen 2013), and as a basis for positioning, i.e. stance-taking, evaluating and presenting the self in opposition to others (Weizman 2008: 2013). The concept of positioning originates in social psychology (cf. the 'positioning theory' of Harré and van Langenhove 1999), where it is concerned with "how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others" (Moghaddam & Harré 2010: 2), and how they construct group contrasts, often with moral implications.

This is where my analysis acquires a critical dimension, since it concentrates on the role of irony in the construction of opposed groups, or more generally, the affective categorization of in-groups and out-groups in terms of the 'ideological square' (van Dijk 1998). The analysis deals with the polarized discursive representation of the groups in terms of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation – a topic that has been covered extensively in Critical Discourse Analysis and stands at the core of identity work and group positioning through such discursive processes as categorization, predication, legitimization and framing (cf. Wodak et al. 1999; Reisigl & Wodak 2001; El Refaie 2001; Hart 2010).

However, the mechanism can be reversed through the operation of irony in reader comments. In other words, an ironist may produce an utterance that, in its literal reading, appears to self-denigrate the in-group. Yet, the negative description of oneself is cancelled through the operation of irony as the opposite meaning is intended. The process of evaluative reversal and the echoic nature of irony also require the analysis to draw on a close interpretation of the local socio-historical contexts (Wodak 2001). The contextual variables include shared background knowledge, national myths, moral discourses of the past, etc., all of which participate in the complex process of self-legitimization in the discursive positioning of the in-group with respect to an out-group (van Leeuwen 2007). While the contextual features are hardly ever explicitly present in the utterances, they form part of the background cultural knowledge. That knowledge is shared within a given community and is involved in the interpretation of ironic utterances.

2. Online comments and discussion forums

Online news discussion forums constitute a post-medial discourse space where users interact with the media text and each other, with their contributions being subject to moderation by the media (Chovanec 2017a; Laineste 2017). Reader comments have recently enjoyed increased attention from linguists (Ensink 2012; Goodman & Rowe 2014; Johansson 2015; Weizman 2015; Chovanec 2017b) since they represent a rich form of modern communication at the intersection between the public and the private domains.

When analysing news discussion forums, some qualitative distinctions may need to be drawn between different types of comments depending on their sequential organization. The present chapter deals mostly with first-order comments (Weizman 2015:177), i.e. direct follow-ups to media texts. This classification is based solely on the principle of sequentiality and does not imply any specific kind of semantic relation to the primary media text. By contrast, second-order comments are reactions to earlier comments by other users. As opposed to first-order, second-order comments manifest a higher degree of addressivity (Bakhtin 1981). This means that they are more explicitly oriented towards the other readers as recipients and less to the media text itself. Often, second-order comments are characterized by prolonged interactional sequences between users (Weizman 2015), sometimes involving flaming and trolling (cf. Hardaker 2010; Hopkinson 2013).

While the analysis in the present chapter deals mainly with first-order comments since they encapsulate the readers' reaction to the media texts and the propositions contained therein, second-order comments are not entirely disre-

garded. This is because sometimes they not only develop the ironic reading of the first-order comments but also confirm the analyst's interpretation of first-order comments as ironic. This confirmation becomes evident from readers' appreciative reactions, which are akin to laughter and other verbal responses in spoken language (Partington 2007).

Since ironic reader comments come as follow-ups, i.e. second parts, to the primary media texts, they recontextualize selected aspects of the news report. As suggested by Johansson (2015), stance-taking, positioning and negotiation of meaning are among the central ways in which readers recontextualize the primary media text. These elements are, incidentally, built into the operation of irony as echoic mention; however, the stance and position expressed by readers in ironic comments cannot be taken at face value. Instead, overt claims are subject to non-literal reading and sometimes hedged by the less-than-serious mode established through irony. The commenter's actual stance can thus be inferred on the basis of the subversion of the literal reading.

There have been a number of studies addressing irony-related issues within the media discourse space (e.g., in news texts, El Refaie 2005) as well as the post-media discourse space (e.g., on failed humour in online comments, Laineste 2013). In her work on follow-ups in news discussion forums, Johansson (2015) notes – in passing – the occasional appearance of ironic remarks. She observes that such comments do not stimulate actual discussion; rather, “most of the writers [i.e., commenters] align with each other in the act of disagreeing, thus participating in the creation of an entertaining moment of shared dissatisfaction” (Johansson 2015:103–104). In the only available study on irony in comments, Weizman (2015) analyses readers' responses to irony contained in media texts. She notes that readers often reciprocate the irony, aligning in their meta-comments with the ironists against the target, i.e., absent third parties. The present study, however, is concerned with a different phenomenon, namely ironic utterances in first-order (and occasionally second-order) reactions to non-ironic media texts.

3. Data and analysis

The analysis is based on a data set of 1,061 reader comments from the mainstream Czech online newspaper *idnes.cz*. All comments are related to the 2015 migration crisis in Europe and all concern a similar issue: news reports on the measures taken by the Austrian government to secure its borders against the influx of migrants arriving into Austria via neighbouring EU countries – Slovenia, Italy and

Hungary. Table 1 provides an overview of the source media texts, listing the total number of posts and the number of ironic comments analysed.

Table 1. Composition of the data set (for links to articles, see Sources)

News headline	No. of comments	No. of ironic posts
EVEN AUSTRIA IS BUILDING A FENCE. IT WANTS TO CHANNEL THE FLOW OF MIGRANTS FROM SLOVENIA (13 November 2015)	357	34
AUSTRIANS TO BUILD A 370-METRE FENCE IN THE ALPS, ITALY DOES NOT LIKE IT (27 April 2016)	434	59
PREVENTION AGAINST REFUGEES. AUSTRIA PREPARES A FENCE ON BORDERS WITH HUNGARY (20 September 2016)	270	28
Total	1,061	121

As regards the historical context in which the data is embedded (Wodak 2001), the articles span a period of one year since the beginning of the migrant crisis in September 2015, when approximately one million individuals arrived in the EU, mostly via Greece and then other European countries. At that time, Hungary completed its fence protecting the external Schengen border with Serbia and was heavily criticised by many Western politicians and NGOs for this act. Particularly strong criticism of the country also came from neighbouring Austria – a fact that provided a major point of reference in many of the reader comments on the crisis. The criticism was eventually extended *en bloc* to the other Central European countries – the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia (the ‘V-4 countries’), on the grounds of their alleged ‘lack of solidarity’ and unwillingness to rescind national control over non-EU migration to Brussels (the ‘migrant quota’ issue). In turn, this led to the entrenchment of a highly polarized discourse among many people in Central Europe, who felt patronized and denigrated by many pronouncements issued by western politicians.¹ On the one hand, there were the West’s summary allegations of the East’s xenophobia and racism and, on the other, there was the East’s perception of the virtue-signalling, political correctness of the West bordering on hypocrisy and anti-East economic bullying.

It is within this highly sensitive context that the reader comments from online news media in one of the V-4 countries, the Czech Republic, attest to how ordinary people (i.e., non-politicians) reacted to these events. Given the disclaimer that the opinions voiced by the readers certainly cannot be representative of the

1. E.g., the then Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann, the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, the Luxembourg foreign minister Jean Asselborn, and many others.

‘majority opinion’ of the general public (Goodman and Rowe 2014), they nevertheless reveal some of the preoccupations that some individuals, possibly the more vocal ones, may hold with respect to current issues. As I show in the sections below, irony plays an important role in these public comments because its oppositional and evaluative potential reveals the preoccupation – or almost obsession – of some of the commenters with identity-related issues. In this sense, irony serves to enhance the sense of collective identity constructed in opposition to other real or imaginary groups (van Dijk 1998).

In general, the identification of irony is somewhat problematic since ironic intent may not be conventionally marked by the ironist. As suggested by Burgers et al. (2011: 190), “when identifying irony, a first (literal) interpretation should be discarded in favor of an (implicit) ironic interpretation”. Despite some approaches formalizing detection, whether on the basis of subsequent reactions or ironic texts themselves (Partington 2007; Burgers et al. 2011), for the identification of irony the recipient and/or the analyst make interpretive judgements based on their knowledge of the situation. The present analysis is based on a close qualitative reading of the data set and the identification of ironic posts by the researcher. Arguably, his membership in the Czech-speaking in-group is helpful in identifying utterances and segments of reader comments where the intended meaning is likely to be non-literal, given his familiarity with the current socio-political situation within the given speech community.

The identification of irony is in some cases facilitated by numerous linguistic and paralinguistic cues provided by the ironists themselves, including smileys and other visual signals alerting the other readers of the non-serious or non-literal intention (cf. Kapogianni 2016). In some cases, second-order comments are useful in confirming the ironic interpretation, particularly where they express a reaction (typically appreciative) of the criticism implicitly expressed through the irony. All the posts classified as ironic were subsequently subjected to an inductive analysis in order to establish how irony is employed in these posts for the construction of in-group/out-group identities. As a result of that procedure, three broad, partly overlapping areas emerged in the data set: irony arising from intertextual references and echoic mentions of other texts (Section 3.1); irony revolving around self- and other-categorization (Section 3.2); and irony in fictionalized narratives (partly co-constructed by several users; Section 3.3).

3.1 Irony and echoic mention

Since irony has a responsive nature, it comes as a reaction to some linguistic or non-linguistic prompt (Weizman 2013). The two central elements that feature in the process are the trigger, i.e. the element that launches the ironic reaction, and

the target, i.e. the object of evaluation. As is the case, the element that stimulates the ironic reaction can be real or purely imagined, i.e. constructed by the ironist as a suitable target for his/her irony. In online news discussion forums, one of the most frequent sources that are recycled through ironic remarks are – as can be expected – the media texts themselves. These are the primary texts that are available to all readers, serving as the basis for various kinds of comments that involve the readers' direct and indirect self-positioning with respect to the prompting text. There are, however, echoic mentions of other than media texts, as well as echoes of utterances of prior, mediatized pronouncements by politicians. Thus, while media texts often serve as triggers as well as targets, it is the social agents behind some of the ironized propositions, i.e. politicians and various groups evoked through echoic mention of their discourses, that become the targets of negative evaluation through irony.

3.1.1 *Echoic mention of primary media texts*

The most salient form of irony in the data set is represented in comments in which readers make explicit reference to certain key formulations in the news texts that lend themselves well to echoic irony and can, ultimately, be interpreted as acts of indirect self-positioning. All three articles that the readers commented on contained the expression 'fence' in their headlines and in all instances, the expression was located within the editorial voice, i.e. it was not marked through quotation marks as either belonging to some other, external voice (Hartley 1982) or as expressing the paper's detachment through what is known as scare quotes (Fairclough 1989). While the construction of the fence is, understandably, the most newsworthy element in all the news reports, ironic remarks on the lexical choice of 'fence' over some other possible forms of reference were the most frequent in the data set, being found in as many as 121 of the comments (i.e. 12 per cent of the total).

Example (1) illustrates how the headline of one of the news reports serves as a trigger for the reader's ironic reaction. Here, the ironist echoically mentions the term 'technical barriers', which belongs to the politically-correct discourse of the out-group ('Western/Austrian politicians/media'), and which is subject to implicit evaluation and criticism:²

(1) *Titulek máte špatně, Rakousko staví technické zábrany!!!*

(Michal Slaviček, 13.11.2015)

You got the headline wrong, Austria builds technical barriers!!!³

2. The author of this chapter is responsible for all translations into English. The Czech versions are retained in their original form, sometimes including unconventional spelling.

The comment is addressed directly at the newspaper, with the reader pointing out the paper's alleged mistake ('You got the headline wrong'). The reason given by the reader in his subsequent explanation constitutes the crucial element for the interpretation of the comment as ironic, namely the description of the fence as a 'technical barrier'. This is, in fact, an intertextual reference to the words uttered by the then Austrian foreign minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner: three weeks earlier, she had used the German phrase 'besondere bauliche Maßnahmen' to describe the plan for erecting special constructions on the Austrian-Slovenian border for the purpose of channelling migrants to official border crossing points. The reader juxtaposes the newspaper's classification of the proposed measures as a 'fence' and the earlier official Austrian designation of the same extralinguistic reality through echoic mention of the euphemistic phrase 'technical barriers'. While it might appear that the comment is, in fact, literally true, it contains an ironic counterpoint that results in the oppositeness of its meaning. The irony resides in the implicit contrast between the designations of the border barriers in Austria and Hungary, a fact that appears to have been a central part of the shared cultural background knowledge within the community of readers at the time.⁴ As such, it serves as a criticism of the official discourse that tries to undermine the severity of the measures.

The terminology issue is taken up by many commenters on multiple occasions. In the following example, the commenter partly echoes the official Austrian designation but elaborates on it, thereby producing his own form of reference that is imbued with a number of implicit evaluative and oppositional meanings:

(2) *Ovšem v Rakousku to nebude plot, ale sluníčková, multikulturní, přátelská stavební úprava.*

(Pavel Fürst, 13.11.2015)

However, in Austria it won't be a fence but a do-gooder, multicultural, friendly construction modification.

3. The expression 'technical barrier' is used intentionally as a literal translation from Czech (and it has nothing to do with the same English term found in economics, as pointed out by one of the reviewers). The word-by-word rendering is preferred to some other, more idiomatic translation in order to convey the meanings of the constituent parts that euphemistically describe the phenomenon. The Czech expression is a translation itself, from the original German phrase 'besondere bauliche Maßnahmen' [special construction measures].

4. The possible dual designation of border protections as either 'fences' or 'technical barriers' has been omnipresent in the public reader comments on migrant issues in Czech newspapers for a very long time, still reverberating strongly two years later in the Spring of 2017. In this sense, it has come to constitute a rhetorical strategy alluding to the hypocrisy of political doublespeak.

In this post, the commenter uses the euphemistic noun ‘modification’ preceded by a string of four adjectives. The overlexicalization present in the description of the fence not only cues the non-serious ironic reading on account of the exaggeration (Shilikhina 2018) but also allows the commenter to implicitly position himself in opposition to the official ideology embodied in those adjectives (cf. ‘do-gooder, multicultural, friendly’ + the euphemistic ‘construction modification’). The ironist specifically targets his criticism at the official Austrian position in the migrant crisis.

In some cases, the commenting readers may even imitate official bureaucratic discourse, thereby undermining and subverting the literal meaning of their own contributions. This is apparent in the following example, which does not – unlike the comments discussed above – provide any echoic reference to the primary media text (e.g., in the form of negating the expressions used). Instead, the entire comment, which consists of an extended nominal phrase, provides an extensive and exaggerated description of how a ‘fence’ could also be described, thus positing an implicit contrast with the categorization offered by the paper:

- (3) *Komplexní humanitární opatření technicko-sociálního rázu lokalizované v oblastech s potřebou sociálních prací s cílem koordinovat obohacující migrační toky.*

(Petr Pospíšil, 13.11.2015)

A complex humanitarian measure of a technical-social nature localized in areas of need of social work with the aim of coordinating the enriching migration flows.

In (3), the exaggerated description, delivered in mock institutional jargon, constitutes the ‘voice of the other’ that is, despite its entirely fictional nature, being echoed. It is the ideology behind that voice that is criticised through irony. Consequently, the commenter disassociates himself from this kind of official representation of events.

Because of the absence of the echoic mention of some element that motivates the irony, this strategy constitutes a more subtle form of self-positioning than the earlier examples. While examples (1) and (2) establish the contrast by means of negating the classification of the barriers as ‘fences’, example (3) leaves out the element triggering the irony altogether. There are other strategies through which commenters can establish the ironic counterpoint in their posts, e.g. through the quasi-dialogic question-answer sequence that juxtaposes the two opposing representations:

- (4) *jaký plot ? to je protipovodňové síto 🤔*

(Martin Sukup, 13.11.2015)

what fence ? It’s an anti-flood sieve 🤔

Here, the ironist first poses a rhetorical question that problematizes the term ‘fence’ used in the news article and then gives his own answer in the form of an alternative classification. The irony is triggered by the contrast between the two forms of reference, where the latter (‘anti-flood sieve’) contains a humorous paradox and is evidently not meant in a literal way. The target of irony is the euphemistic semantic engineering that obfuscates direct reference to reality. Interestingly, the utterance contains two instances of figurative language: the fence is likened to a sieve and the migrants are represented in terms of a flood (and thus operating with the ‘people are water’ metaphor theme, cf. El Refaie 2001 and below).

Examples like these attest to the commenters’ linguistic creativity that accompanies their attempts at producing ironic statements. Interestingly enough, none of the examples above has generated any response from the other readers, apart from obtaining numerous ‘likes’. The creativity is also apparent in some longer, more narrative posts, where the ironists can engage in ironic fictionalizations (see also Section 3.3), as in the following example:

- (5) *V rakousku se rozhodli postavit plot. Vlastně plot, to je příliš silné slovo. Spíše bariéru z pletiva. I když – ve skutečnosti se jedná jen o zábranu. Takové malé technické opatření. A na 247 km této úpravy terénu vysoké 3 m udělali branku* (Jindřich Kuchař, 20.9.2016)

In Austria they have decided to build a fence. Actually, a fence, that’s too strong a word. Rather, a barrier from wiring. But actually – it is truly just an obstruction. A kind of small technical measure. And in this 247 km long correction of the terrain, 3 m high, they made a little gate.

This entirely fictionalized narrative account is built on the co-referential chain of quasi synonyms that keep replacing, sentence after sentence, the lexeme ‘fence’ with increasingly more euphemistic expressions (‘fence’ → ‘barrier from wiring’ → ‘just an obstruction’ → ‘small technical measure’ → ‘modification of the terrain’). This serves as a gradual set-up for the final sentence (delivered almost as a punch line), which posits the unexpected contrast between the extremely euphemistic expression (‘correction of the terrain’), the extremely exaggerated dimensions of this measure (‘247 km long’, ‘3 m high’), and the insignificant entry point (‘a little gate’). The irony trigger in this example consists of the chain of expressions that transform the reality (‘fence’) into a watered-down, presumably inoculate euphemism (‘correction of the terrain’), which needs to be read non-literally. Within the chain of synonyms, the ironist includes the euphemistic phrase ‘technical measure’, which serves an echoic mention of the official designation of the fence by the Austrian authorities [see also examples (1–3)], and which forms a part of shared background knowledge. Thanks to these elements, irony targets the

hypocrisy of official and political discourse, in particular the ambivalent Austrian position vis-à-vis the migrant crisis.

3.1.2 *Echoic mention of non-media texts and intertextuality*

As already suggested above, ironic statements may derive from the echoic mention of other texts than the primary news media text that readers comment on. This is a form of intertextuality that introduces an additional voice into the text (Fairclough 1992) that is not only external but also frequently unattributed. As a result, the inclusion of the voice in the comment sets up the possibility of juxtaposing the reader's own position against that of the accessed voice. This phenomenon occurs in the following example:

- (6) *Italum se to nelibi, nebot si zrejme nechteji nechat cely ten "ekonomicky prinos" – jak nam bylo podsouvano – jen sami pro sebe*
(Jan Lukáš, 27.4.2016)

Italians don't like it because they apparently don't want to keep the whole "economic benefit" – as we were being told – just to themselves.

In this post, the reader uses the expression 'economic benefit' that refers to the official argument offered by pro-immigration politicians to justify their position in the early stages of the 2015 migration crises. Strictly speaking, the utterance in example (6) is not ironic because it is based on an explicit rather than implicit echoic mention. Irony is created by the use of the inverted commas. The scare quotes have a dual function here: not only do they identify the exact discourse segment that becomes intertextually embedded within the reader's comment (this being an explicit mention) but, most importantly for the present analysis, mark the reader's ironical non-alignment with that representation and his openly critical attitude towards it.

Interestingly, the phrase 'economic benefit' is complemented with the interpolation 'as we were being told', which enhances the status of the phrase as an unattributed mention of some unspecified prior text. Moreover, the interpolation manages to frame the ironized phrase in terms of a more explicit oppositional discourse, since it constructs the collectivity of the in-group ('we'). The out-group ('them'), which is responsible for the claim that non-EU migrants represent 'economic benefit', is not specified in the post due to the deletion of the semantic agent in the passive construction ('as we were being told'), yet this is arguably the ultimate target of the reader's criticism.

Another instance of irony can be found in the rest of the utterance. The reader makes the claim that Italy objects to the Austrian fence because 'they don't want to keep [the migrants] to themselves.' Since the meaning of the 'economic benefit' has been undermined through the use of inverted commas, it is clear that the

reader believes and claims that migrants do not constitute economic benefit to a host country and seems to think that Italians share his view. Underlying this argumentation is the contrast between Italy's desire to send away (at least some) immigrants (literal meaning) and the implicit suggestion that they should not do so because immigrants constitute 'economic benefit' (non-literal meaning).

It appears from the data set that some posts contain various ironic designations for refugees and migrants, whether the commenters express their detachment from the particular representations through scare quotes or not. This includes such labels as 'multicultural enrichers' (*multikulturní obohacovači*), 'elite illiterate university graduates' (*elita negramotných vysokoškoláků*), 'highly educated and qualified avalanche' (*vysoce vzdělaná a kvalifikovaná lavina*), etc. While the former of these labels has now become a relatively well-established, conventional form of ironic reference, the latter two juxtapose quite contrasting representations that play with some echoes of the readers' assumptions about official and mainstream media discourses on migrants. Thus, they contrast the alleged claims of the migrants' elite educational achievements with their assumed illiteracy in the second example and with their metaphorical, non-human representation in terms of a natural catastrophe in the third (cf. the expression 'avalanche'; see also Santa Ana 1999; El Refaie 2001; Chovanec 2010). The inclusion of these qualifications (which are logically incompatible and thus constitute the rhetorical device of oxymoron) within a single phrase underlines the critical attitude of the readers and their scepticism about the legitimacy of some representations of migrants that had been circulated in the media space in the early stages of the migrant crisis. In all these cases, the target of irony is the discourse of the 'other' (the media, the politicians, Austria, the 'West'), which is criticised through the negative evaluation contained in the non-literal reading of such utterances.

3.2 Irony and categorization

The second broad area where irony is present in the reader comments consists of categorization, i.e. the discursive representation of individuals and groups in terms of certain categories and types. Because of the thematic composition of the data set, the categorization is typically built around the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', with the in-group and the out-group collectivities being specified with varying degrees of explicitness. I will illustrate the examples of irony in connection with self-categorization and other-categorization. While complementary and inseparable, these forms of categorization are teased apart in this section for the purpose of a clearer exemplification.

3.2.1 Self-categorization

Self-categorization involves communicative behaviour whereby interlocutors classify themselves as belonging to a particular group or having certain (usually positive) qualities. Those involve referential and predication strategies, whereby members of the in-group identify and describe themselves (Wodak 2001; Wodak et al. 1999). As regards the comments made in Czech news discussion forums, the self-categorizing acts are primarily oriented towards other members of the in-group, i.e. people from the same linguistic community.⁵ It appears from the data that while self-categorization can be performed explicitly, readers often resort to irony to provide, instead, a characterization of some out-group (in the literal reading of the utterance). This ploy actually enables them to ultimately perform an indirect act of self-positioning that is linked to the oppositional, non-literal meaning of the utterance.

This is what we find in examples (7) and (8) below: while there is negative other-presentation, the commenters imply (in 7) and openly state (in 8) an assumed negative characterization of the in-group. Such an ironic negative characterisation of the other (the Austrians) and indirect negative characterisation of the self (the in-group) is present in the following comment:

- (7) *Ale jděte... taková nehorázná rasistická a xenofobní řešení. Vždyť přece právě z tohoto státu k nám směřují neustálé poučky a doporučení jak se máme chovat a co máme a nemáme (smíme a nesmíme) dělat. A panečku najednou plot!*
(Michal Marek, 20.9.2016)

Oh come on... such blatant racist and xenophobic solutions. After all, from this country there emanate towards us constant lessons and recommendations on how we should behave and what we should and should not (may and may not) do. And wow suddenly a fence!

The ironic effect arises through the use of the discourse marker ('after all') and the exclamatory sentence ('and wow suddenly a fence'), but the crucial element here consists of the phrase 'blatant racist and xenophobic solutions', which concentrates the negative other-presentation and whose validity is ultimately cancelled through the irony. While the ironist directs this categorization at the Austrians, the phrase actually constitutes an echoic mention of the Austrian (and, by extension West-

5. Such an 'inward orientation' of comments contrasts with discussion forums in some other languages (e.g. German, Spanish, Italian) that are much more accessible to speakers from other linguistic backgrounds. Thanks to the global role of English, English-language news sites (such as *The Guardian* newspaper) have a significant international participation and are, thus, 'transnational' rather than confined to their local, domestic audiences (cf. also Molek-Kozakowska and Chovanec 2017).

ern) discourse against the position of some Central and Eastern European countries in the migrant crisis, who had been labelled ‘racist and xenophobic’ on account of their restrained official stand in the migrant crisis. To understand what is going on here, we have to unravel the complex syllogism contained in the reader’s comment and see how that is cancelled through irony. It contains a deduction based on the following two propositions:

- a. Premise 1: ‘building a fence is racist and xenophobic’ (this premise represents the Austrian/Western position towards Hungary at the onset of the migrant crisis)
- b. Premise 2: ‘Austria builds a fence’
- c. Deduction: ‘Austria is racist and xenophobic’

Now, the role of irony in this syllogism is as follows: Once the deduction (c), which is articulated in the first part of the reader’s comment and constitutes the literal meaning of the utterance, comes to be perceived as incorrect on account of the non-literal reading implied through irony (i.e., ‘Austria is NOT racist and xenophobic’), then the starting premise becomes cancelled as well, implying that such ‘solutions’ [fences] are NOT ‘racist and xenophobic’. This, however, is more than just a demolition of this argument. Thanks to the echoic mention of the utterance (‘racist and xenophobic’), which is understood as the out-group’s (the Austrian’s/the West’s) view of Central and Eastern Europeans, the in-group can obtain a symbolic vindication: the in-group can no longer be accused of racism and xenophobia on account of building fences (as happened shortly before in Hungary) or opposing unrestrained immigration (as was the case with some other V-4 countries). Through the ironic reading, the comment can be interpreted as implicit criticism of the past (Western European) patronising behaviour towards other countries and the fact that Austria is now building a fence itself.⁶ Also, thanks to the inclusive pronoun ‘we’, the presenter also subsumes his Czech national collectivity within the higher-level collectivity of Central and Eastern Europeans.

Thus, the commenter negatively characterizes the out-group (‘racist and xenophobic’), only to cancel this characterization through irony. However, thanks to the echoic nature and the evocation of the discourse of the out-group about the in-group, the commenter ultimately achieves an indirect positive self-presentation. Irony functions as a self-defence mechanism for a member of the in-group since it

6. In this kind of discourse, the fence symbolically represents a justifiable position of taking a stand against uncontrolled migration, and its meaning shifts from the embodiment of (eastern European) alleged racism to a sensible form of self-protection against the violation of the national/European body politic by the migrants (Musolf 2010).

helps to counter the negative presentation of the in-group by the out-group where the latter can be claimed to behave in the same way. In other words, it is a tool for reclaiming the in-group's position and legitimizing its beliefs and values that are under threat from the out-group (van Leeuwen 2007, Cap 2008, 2013).

In this sense, irony functions as an interesting discursive mechanism that modifies the normal operation of the 'ideological square' (van Dijk 1998; Wirth-Koliba 2016), i.e. positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. With irony, negative other-presentation becomes relativized or cancelled. This might seem to go counter to one's expectations about how self- and other-presentation is typically achieved; however, the mitigation of negative other-presentation through irony occurs in a situation when an in-group member (in this case the Czech commenter) seeks some kind of alignment with the out-group (the Austrians). The ultimate aim is, thus, presenting oneself in positive (or at least non-negative) way.

In the following example, we find an imaginary scenario consisting of a highly positive presentation of the out-group (Austrians), and a negative self-presentation. Here, the reader makes a negative reference to his own in-group by implying that the 'in-group locks migrants up'. Once again, the irony, cued by the absurdity of the positive other-presentation of the Austrian out-group, actually serves to cancel the negativity predicated about the in-group:

- (8) *Nenechejte se mýlit, ten plot Rakušané staví na ochranu samotných migrantů – aby je vítací výbory a davy Rakušanů neušlapali ve snaze jim nabídnout pomoc, ubytování... Rakušané přece nelegální migranty nezavírají za mříže jak my... 😊*

(Josef Krůpa, 25+, 13.11.2015)

Don't be mistaken, the Austrians are building the fence for the protection of the migrants – so that they would not be trampled by welcoming committees and crowds of Austrians in their effort to offer them help, accommodation... Austrians do not place illegal migrants behind bars as we do... 😊

The kind of self-positioning and ironic self-presentation found in the examples above is inextricably tied with the way the 'other' is represented within the relational pair of 'us' and 'them'. Once again, the collectivities involved in this process are, roughly speaking, the 'East' vs. the 'West'. It is implied that there is in fact no significant difference between the Czechs and the Austrians. The third group – the migrants – have a relatively less important and merely instrumental role in this kind of argumentation.

3.2.2 Other-categorization

There are cases, however, when the focus is on the representation of the out-group. A relatively straightforward situation occurs when any reference to the in-group is missing. Only one member of the relational pair of 'us' and 'them' is explicitly pre-

sent in the comment, while the other side of the dichotomy can be inferred. The following comments represent a kind of template of ironic other-categorization, potentially consisting of several elements:

- (9) *Jsou to oškliví xenofobové. Fuj...* 😊
 (Martin Hromádka, 20.9.2016)
 They're disgusting xenophobes. Yuck... 😊
- (10) *Hanba! Xenofobove! Fuuuj* 😊
 (Jan Michl, 27.4.2016)
 Shame! Xenophobes! Yuuuck! 😊

The literal meaning of these utterances concerns an extreme negative presentation of the out-group (the Austrians) but this is patently not the commenters' intended meaning, since irony modifies the meaning towards the non-literal. In these examples, the elements constituting the ironic frame appear to be: a negative referential expression for categorizing the out-group ('xenophobes'); potentially also a negative quality predicated about the other ('disgusting') or an indication of a righteous moral stance of the commenter, as a representative of the in-group ('shame!'); and an additional booster of the negativity through evaluation (such as the minimal interjection 'yuck', expressing mock disgust). These brief negative statements are then complemented with a smiley, which signals the authors' critical and ironic stance. In this way, the smileys cue a semantic reversal, indicating that a non-literal reading is intended. As with the earlier examples, the negative categorization of the out-group ('disgusting xenophobes') seems to be echoic of the way the out-group actually refers to the commenter's in-group. However, since the preferred non-literal meaning of the utterance is, roughly, 'building a fence is not per se xenophobic', it ultimately serves to justify a pro-fence attitude (i.e. the one held by the Czech in-group) as not xenophobic.

However, it appears to be more frequent for other-categorization to be complemented with an explicit contrastive reference to another group, whether the in-group (in the classic model of 'us' versus 'them') or some other, third collectivity. Arguably, the presentation in terms of such an overt and polarized dichotomy enables the commenter to exaggerate the categorization up to a point where it becomes either absurd or blatantly untrue. This is what occurs in example (11):

- (11) *iDnes, nelžete! Rakušané nestaví žádný plot! Jedná se o humanitární technickou bariéru. Xenofóbní plot staví jen ti zlí fašisti Maďaři...* 😊
 (Petr Hamžík, 105+, 13.11.2015)
 iDnes, do not lie! Austrians aren't building any fence! This is a humanitarian technical barrier. Xenophobic fence is built only by those evil fascists Hungarians... 😊

In addition to the strategies identified above (direct address of the newspaper, echoic mention of the news text, ironic denial and contestation of terminology), this example posits the contrast between Austrians and Hungarians, approaching the issue from what transpires as the perceived stereotypical position of describing Austrians as ‘good’ and Hungarians as ‘bad’ in relation to the migration crisis. The commenter frames the Hungarians in terms of not only moral failure and negative character traits (‘evil’) but also extreme political behaviour, associating them with the fascist ideology. The exaggeration, together with the obvious untruth of one of the statements (‘Austrians aren’t building any fence!’), is what triggers the ironic reading. In addition, not to leave anyone in doubt about the ironic and humorous intent, the commenting reader also concludes the post with a multimodal element cueing the non-serious mode: a tongue-in-cheek smiley.⁷

3.2.3 Polarized categorization and intertextuality

In some comments, the polarized categorization, which is subject to ironic reversal, is complemented with additional statements in the form of explicit or veiled historical and cultural references. Such references are only intelligible to members of the in-group and, as with the examples above, serve as carriers of evaluation. Moreover, they invite the other readers to draw parallels between various cultural and historical reminiscences and the current situation, by extending the dichotomous polarization to more general collectivities (e.g. the East/West dichotomy).

In example (12), this is attested in the form of a brief aside at the end of the comment. Let us first explicate the operation of irony: the commenter sets up a comparison between the Hungarian ‘ugly fence’ and the Austrian ‘construction measure’, whereby he invites the other readers to reflect on the contrast between the differential classification of apparently corresponding reality in the two countries. The incongruity leads us to reconsider the literalness of the statement and indicates a potential non-literal, ironic reading. The commenter displays a mock resignation to the perceived double standard (cf. the observation ‘but that’s okay’):

- (12) *Madarsko postavilo svůj ošklivý plot na vnější hranici Schengenu, v souladu s jeho ochranou. Rakušáci to své už nestavebníopatřeníanibránasdlouhými-*

7. I agree with the reviewer in that the emoticons in the previous examples – the ‘annoyed’ emoticon in (8) and ‘laughing’ emoticons in (9) and (10) – are not used as inherent indicators of irony, unlike the ‘tongue-in-the cheek’ found in (11). They mark an intensification of the commenter’s negative stance in the former and an indication of the playful mood in the latter case. I would argue that in (9) and (10), however, the ‘laughing’ emoticon is actually used to preempt the expected reaction from the other readers. In that sense, the emoticon serves both as an indication of the commenter’s non-serious intent and an ironic trigger implying that non-literal reading of the utterance is the preferred one.

křídly a letedat a kyplotno stavějí na vnitřní, formální hranici, ale to je v pohodě. Holt rovní a rovnější.

(Tomáš Jelínek, 20.9.2016)

Hungary built its ugly fence on the external Schengen border, in harmony with its protection. Austrians are building their no-longer-construction-measure-nor-gate-with-long-wings-but-a-fence-in-spite-of-that⁸ on the internal, formal border but that's okay. There we go, equal and more equal.

Through irony, the reader questions and undermines the dichotomized representation of the group contrast, which is presented from the assumed perspective of the Austrians, i.e. as negative other presentation (Hungary is bad) and positive self-presentation (Austria is good). In other words, the commenter sides with the Hungarians. The reader's cynical commentary on the perceived underlying hypocrisy of the Austrians is additionally reflected in the final sarcastic comment ('There we go, equal and more equal'), which is an intertextual allusion to a famous quote from George Orwell's dystopian novel *Animal Farm*. Given the historical experience of Central and Eastern European countries, this kind of reference has a rather bitter resonance, possibly triggering other readers' inferencing processes and inviting a comparison between the past (e.g., the declarations of fake equality during the Soviet era) and the present (e.g., the proclamations of equality between member states in the EU).

Comments like these go much beyond a mere attempt at creating ironical situations and expressing the commenters' own positions towards the migrant crisis and the out-groups concerned. They are heavily grounded in the local historical contexts and raise some serious social and political questions. They might be read as cynical complaints about the in-group members' loss of illusions during the transition era from socialism to capitalism. In fact, many reader comments snatch the opportunity to explicitly articulate the differential perception of realities in the West and the East, as in example (13):

- (13) *Koukám, že nastala PLOTOMÁNIE i u našich západních sousedů. Není to plot, ale jen taková menší zábrana. Ve východní Evropě jsou to ploty a v západní Evropě se to nazývá ZÁBRANA.*

(Milan Podžorský, 35+, 13.11.2015)

I see that there's FENCEMANIA occurring with our western neighbours too.

It's not a fence but a kind of small barrier. In Eastern Europe they're fences and in Western Europe it's called BARRIER.

8. The Czech example contains a rather creative and witty use of language – the avoidance of spaces between words, which evokes the German word-formation pattern of producing multiple solid compounds. Through this formal device, the phenomenon referred to is characterized as belonging to the German-speaking world, in this case Austria.

Here, the reader targets the perceived double standards for the East and the West. The irony is triggered by the obvious incongruity between the two representations ('fences' vs. 'barrier'), giving rise to the non-literal reading, i.e. that the commenter is bitterly critical of the hypocritical doublespeak. Comments like these expose the rift between Western (or 'old') and Eastern (or 'new') EU states and appear to emanate from the self-perception by many Central and Eastern Europeans of their status of second-class EU citizens. In this sense, the metalinguistic debate about the terms of reference to the Austrian 'fence' epitomizes their views concerning the inequality between old and new EU states.⁹

The comparison between the past and the present (as mentioned above) is another theme that is recurrent in the data. More specifically, it operates with the unstated presumption that building fences is sometimes considered as a post-communist heritage and a decidedly 'Eastern' and not 'Western' issue:

(14) *No fuj, další země poznamenaná 40-ti lety komunismu, která nechce patřit na západ...*

(Michal Zelenka, 13.11.2015)

Oh yuck, another country scarred by 40 years of communism that doesn't want to belong to the West...

The comment refers to Austria, which not only did not experience Soviet-era socialism but it also ranks among the showcase western countries whose success has often served as a model for other EU states. Once again, the evident untruth and exaggeration trigger the non-literal, oppositional reading characteristic of ironic utterances. In this case, irony undermines the unstated underlying assumption ('fences are built in the post-communist eastern world only and signal backwardness') and delegitimizes that view as false.

The last example in this section provides a slightly different take on the deeply cultural contextualization of ironic comments and references. The post below, which comes as a reaction to an earlier comment by another reader, spells out the familiar group dichotomy and repeats the ironic characterization in terms of pos-

9. This rift is felt as very acute by many inhabitants in Central and Eastern European countries. As suggested by Günter Verheugen, the former high-profile European Commissioner for Enlargement (1999–2004), in an interview given to the Czech news magazine *E15* in January 2017, that perception has some real basis: "[i]f the new – in inverted commas – member states want or stand up for something, the reactions of some of the old member states, mainly Germany and France, are arrogant and ignorant. When new members dare to have a different opinion, they are often told to be grateful and be silent. That is against the spirit of European integration. Member states are not divided into first and second categories. They are equal and that must be respected." (Source: <<http://nazory.e15.cz/rozhovory/gunter-verheugen-odchod-britu-z-unie-je-mozna-jen-zacatek-1327485>> (7 March 2017, translated by the author).

itive and negative evaluation. However, it elaborates by drawing an unusual parallel to bombing:

- (15) *Konečně to někdo pochopil. Rakouský plot je humanitární, maďarský je rassistický. V tom je ten základní rozdíl. Stejně jako v bombardování. Nejde o účinek bomby na civilisty, jde o to, kdo ji hází. To rozhoduje o tom, zda je bomba ošklivá, nebo hodná.*

(Vít Otahal, reaction to another post, 20.9.2016)

Finally someone understood it. The Austrian fence is humanitarian, the Hungarian one is racist. That is the fundamental difference. The same with bombing. It is not about the effect a bomb has on civilians, it is about who drops it. That decides if the bomb is ugly or good.

The key to the ironical interpretation of the comment lies in the adjective 'humanitarian'. While it appears in the second sentence in an explicit reference to the Austrian fence, the adjective probably motivated the commenter to continue his post by providing one of its recent collocates, namely the noun 'bombing', and to elaborate with the comparison between the building of fences and the bombing of people. The phrase 'humanitarian bombing' is, of course, an ironic oxymoron, dating back to the recent war in the Balkans. The phrase appeared in 1999 in reference to NATO's controversial bombing of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo war, and is erroneously ascribed to the former Czech President Václav Havel, who vehemently denied the claim.¹⁰ In the example, the commenter uses an analogy between the misnomer 'humanitarian bombing', which is inherently ironic because of the semantic incompatibility of its constituents, and the official discourse that assigns different descriptions and evaluations to the fences. Thanks to the analogy, the literal meaning needs to be discounted, and the non-literal reading of the utterance is brought to the surface, i.e. the readers realize that the commenter is not being serious about his proposition ('the Austrian fence is humanitarian, the Hungarian one is racist').

3.3 Irony and fictionalization

In the final section, I want to discuss ironic comments that are involved in ironists' fictional scenarios. In humour studies, the concept of 'fictionalization' has been

10. See Havel's statement in the newspaper *MF Dnes*, 24 May 2004, available online on the president's website at <http://vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=clanky&val=80_clanky.html&typ=HTML>. The Czech phrase has now been lexicalized and is part of cultural knowledge: it denotes a cynical view on the conflict between the idealism of humanistic proclamations and the actual reality, as well as on the hypocrisy of international politics in connection with military actions.

used to describe the elaboration of evidently untrue and humorous utterances in such domains as authentic conversation (Kotthoff 1999; Stallone & Haugh 2016), online news media commentary (Chovanec 2012a), and most recently the social media (Tsakona 2017). In news reader comments, fictionalizations can combine with irony and be used to criticize and undermine opinions and positions opposite to those of the ironist.

The comment in example (16) contains an example of such fictionalization: the statement presents an entirely made-up account that is ironic on account of its absurdity (cf. the notion of ‘surrealistic irony’ proposed by Kapogianni, 2011):

- (16) *Angela a šašek z Lucemburska právě nasadají do aut a s bouracími kladivý jedou hájit svobodu cestování a světlé zítřky Evropy na rakousko-maďarskou hranici* 😊
(Milan Šipla, 20.9.2016)

Angela and the clown from Luxembourg are just getting in a car and leaving to defend, with sledgehammers, the freedom of movement and the bright tomorrows of Europe on the Austrian-Hungarian border 😊

The commenter refers informally to the German chancellor Angela Merkel with her first name as ‘Angela’. The second politician referred to in the post is – most likely – the Luxembourg minister of foreign affairs Jean Asselborn, who is described with the dismissive and denigrating label ‘clown from Luxembourg’.¹¹ The delegitimization of the opposing opinion of the out-group (i.e., the one held by the western politicians) is carried out not only through the denigrating expression ‘clown’, which cues a non-serious social role, but also in the contrasting semantic scripts evoked in the utterance. Professional politicians are represented as political activists involved in physical actions (‘with sledgehammers’). Similar to some of the earlier comments discussed above (particularly 14 and 15), this example builds on a body of shared cultural knowledge, which is – through surrealistic ironic counterpoint – skilfully used to undermine the opposing opinion of the out-group.

Another instance of irony in the comment above is to be found in the phrase ‘bright tomorrows’ (*světlé zítřky*). It introduces a complex level of intertextual knowledge based on the readers’ national culture. The phrase was used during the country’s socialist past in reference to the idealized goal promised to the common

11. Since there is no mention of any politician from Luxembourg in the news article, the reference could in theory also be to the president of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker. However, only one week earlier, Jean Asselborn proposed that Hungary should be dismissed from the European Union for its position in the migrant crisis – a suggestion that was heavily criticised in the Czech Republic. For that reason, the reference to Asselborn appears to be more likely. See: <<http://zahranicni.eurozpravy.cz/eu/168385-vyloucení-maďarska-z-eu-na-asselborna-se-snesla-smrst-kritiky-ohradilo-se-i-cesko/>>.

preface utterances that may be humorous or ironic, sometimes embarrassingly so on account of some stupidity. It functions as a hedge: when a humorous or ironic utterance opens with this phrase, recipients will know that an intertextual allusion is intended and that the subsequent humorous or ironic incident is narrated with the teller's awareness of its underlying stupidity.

This first-order non-ironic comment, however, is followed-up by a second-order comment from another reader, who develops the analogy through sarcasm and irony (see example 17b). Here, the reader continues with the fictionalized scenario started by the previous commenter, by supplying an assumed official position of the EU (see the fictional attribution of the utterance: 'According to Brussels'). The additional punchline (cf. the echoic mention of 'solidary redistribution', intertextually referencing the official EU discourse on the migrant crisis) to the jointly constructed fictionalization can be read as a bitterly ironic commentary on the attempts of some western leaders to impose migrant redistribution quotas on all EU countries against their will.¹³ Importantly, the central script that both of the readers construct in their contributions operates with a metaphor where the refugee crisis is conceptualized in terms of a burst pipe accident. Underlying is the conventional metaphorical theme of PEOPLE ARE WATER, which is very commonly found in anti-immigrant discourse across various cultural communities (El Refaie 2001; Hart 2010).

From an interactional perspective, it is significant that while the initial post (17a) is fully self-contained, it serves as a prompt to another reader, who supplies a follow-up (17b). The reaction develops the irony, giving rise to a very obvious critical reading of the position of both readers on this political issue. An additional reaction comes from a third commenter, who joins in by appreciating the irony by means of putting three thumb-up signs into the post (17c). What we see is the emergence of chaining in these posts, with subsequent commenters developing the discussion further, very much as in other forms of asynchronous communication in various genres of computer-mediated communication (Haugh & Chang 2015) and social media (Tsakona 2018). The exchange of these comments resembles banter in everyday conversation, and the provision of smileys is akin to laughter responses to irony in spontaneous conversation (Kotthoff 2003).

In the example, the cooperative behaviour gives rise to joint ironizing: one ironic comment is followed up by another one. By developing the common topic in a similar way, the commenters achieve alignment. The co-participation of other readers is achieved either by further commenting or by liking the posts. My final

13. The redistribution quotas that were pushed by the EU in autumn 2015 were approved by so-called qualified majority against the will of several Central European countries.

example documents another instance of such joint ironizing, with both contributors constructing a fully fictional scenario:

- (18) a. *Hodny plot* 😊😊😊
 (Michal Frýdek, 13.11.2015)
 A good[-natured] fence 😊😊😊
- b. *Nepíchá, voní a hraje meditační hudbu.*
 (Petr Pospisil, 13.11.2015)
 It does not prick, it smells nice and plays meditational music.

In the first of these posts, the reader uses the Czech adjective *hodný* ('good-natured'), which collocates only with animate nouns designating humans and animals. Since the adjective refers to a character trait or a form of behaviour, it is clearly incongruent with the inanimate noun 'fence'. This collocational incongruity serves as a contextual cue keying the ironic reading of the utterance, with the reader's humorous intention additionally explicated non-verbally through the use of multiple smileys.

As regards the interactional development of the post, the follow-up in example (18b) pursues the humorous theme further by adding another personified characterization of the fence that is incongruous with actual reality. Not only is animate semantic agency suggested ('it does not prick', 'it plays meditational music') but the comment also conveys characteristics that are overly 'positive' and 'welcoming'. Once again, the absurdity of the scenario underlies the irony in the comment and invites other readers to infer non-literal meanings. Given the specific international context at the time, the comments could be read as a negative assessment of the exceedingly positive official representation of the Austrian fence by the out-group (i.e., the EU/Austria) in the earlier stage of the migrant crisis.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of ironic reader comments in discussion forums in online newspapers has yielded a number of findings that are relevant both from a pragmatic and more critical discourse analytical points of view, as far as the discursive management of the ironist's positioning of oneself and others is concerned.

First of all, ironic posts tend to be first-order comments, i.e. those reacting directly to the media text. The comments that are contributed in this privileged position function as follow-ups to the news article, with the ironists having the freedom to decide whether to direct their irony against the media channel or the news actors. In the former case, irony – as a form of echoic mention – serves to critique the choice of the topic, the linguistic treatment of the news event, or the

editorial line articulated in the primary news text. In the latter case, it subverts the official ideological views, whether explicit or implicit, actual or presumed, that are held or represented by politicians and other news actors, thereby enabling the ironists to position themselves with respect to such multiple targets. The main targets of irony, as argued in this chapter, are not only those opinions but mostly the proponents of the official discourse, whose positions on the migrant crisis is thereby being delegitimized. The counter-positioning against the implicit 'other' can fluctuate between various imagined out-groups, ranging from political affiliations ('common people' vs. 'the media' / 'the PC politicians' / 'pro-immigrant citizens') to national/cross-national groupings ('Czechs' / 'Central Europeans' / 'new EU-members' vs. 'Western Europeans' / 'EU politicians' / 'old EU-15-members', etc.). The nature of group dichotomies is, thus, quite flexible and can change case by case. In this sense, the out-group resembles a 'floating signifier' (Wodak 2015:xi).

As regards the interactional view, it appears that first-order ironic comments typically do not generate extensive discussions. When other readers react, they may appreciate the irony through giving 'likes' to the post. Indeed, popularity may be the motivation of many ironists, particularly those who post their comments early after the discussion forum opens. Other readers may develop the humorous or ironical potential in the first-order comments or express their evaluation in independent follow-up posts (i.e., in second-order comments). While it would seem that ironic comments neither trigger factual discussions nor escalate into confrontational exchanges, the suggestion that ironic posts (given their echoic character) constitute relatively self-contained units is yet to be confirmed by more conclusive findings based on a much larger sample of data. In any case, some other research indicates that ironic utterances can function as a sort of 'communicative dead-end', i.e. they do not give rise to more extended exchanges. This phenomenon could be explained in terms of the operation of the 'Least Disruption Principle' (Attardo 2000; Tsakona 2011:60), under which "the literal frame is restored relatively quickly" after ironic statements are made, as documented by Tsakona (2011:72) in her study of parliamentary discourse.

It may thus be the case that irony in reader comments, which occurs in a significant number of reader posts, constitutes a discursive strategy whereby the ironists can express their discordant opinions on a number of issues without having to substantiate and justify their differing positions. It seems that irony is a relatively safe way of airing dissonant views because of the indirectness involved in it. It allows the ironists to be highly critical, without attacking the target directly and laying out one's own view explicitly enough so that it could be attacked and delegitimized by others. In this sense, irony is similar to other forms of implicit representation that may be denied when openly challenged by others (e.g. allusion,

cf. Wodak 2011; Chovanec 2012b). Some of these effects, of course, arise from the fact that irony evokes the less serious (and in some modes openly non-serious) mode, which makes it difficult to constructively question and oppose the opinions implied and/or held by the ironists.

Arguably, this function is particularly salient in comments on highly controversial political issues that cause major disagreements among people, both domestically and internationally. Irony becomes an effective tool for expressing an oppositional view with respect to explicit prior utterances as well as implicit beliefs held by or ascribed to others. In debates on such topics as the migrant crisis, it can be used to affirm the self-righteous self-perception of the in-group, as represented by the ironist. Thanks to irony, the ironists can engage, for instance, in an over-exaggerated negative self-presentation, which is explicitly or implicitly predicated as the way the in-group is seen by the out-group. The eventual absurdity of such make-believe self-denigration and similar fictionalized scenarios results in ironic counterpoint, thereby subverting the claimed propositions. In terms of the positioning work performed by ironists, such communicative acts are crucial for their positive self-presentation.

Interestingly enough, while the self-categorization is necessarily relational, i.e. revolving around the out-group's actions or the out-group's perception of the in-group, it need not automatically imply the ascription of negative characteristics to the other. This is because the ultimate focus may be on positive self-presentation (achieved through ironic counterpoint), e.g. where the in-group feels unjustly misconstrued by the out-group (as in the case of Central/Eastern Europeans negatively constructed by many Western politicians as xenophobic/racist/non-solidary, etc.). The irony in reader comments is, then, very much about the self and not about the other.

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The Rolling Stones promoting Monty Python

The power of irony and banter

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Based on Text World Theory, this chapter offers a fine-grained analysis of how irony and banter are likely to be processed by viewers watching a promotional video but also highlights the pragmatic functions of such an indirect strategy. It dissects a 1:40 tongue-in-cheek video which served as an introduction to the 2014 *Monty Python Live (Mostly)* press conference. It features Mick Jagger accusing the coming troupe of being “wrinkly old men trying to relive their youth”, using irony and banter as powerful means of promotion. Bringing together different theoretical frameworks of irony that are usually described as competing, this chapter highlights how expectations are twisted in the “text-world” of the video through the use of (mock) dramatic irony, generating pragmatic paradoxes.

1. Introduction

Irony has been approached through a wide variety of theoretical frameworks¹ and applied to diverse discursive genres.² It has more rarely been studied in relation to banter in discourse. Banter is traditionally described as a rapid interactive

1. As echo (Sperber & Wilson 1981; Wilson & Sperber 1992), as pretence (Clark & Gerrig 1984), as indirect negation (Giora 1995, 2003; Giora & Fein 1999; Peleg et al. 2008), as bicohesion (Barbe 1993, 1995), as implicit display (Utsumi 2000), as relevant inappropriateness (Attardo 2000), as bicoherence (Shelley 2001), as reversal of evaluation (Partington 2007), as mock politeness (Leech 1983, 2014), as paradox (Simpson 2011), as overt untruthfulness and negative evaluation (Dynel 2014), perspectival irony as ironic disengagement (Morini 2016), among others.

2. The dominant paradigm has been literary irony (Muecke 1969; Booth 1974). But other corpora have been employed in the past twenty years: Hutcheon (1994)'s ethical approach focuses on irony in the rhetoric of texts; Partington (2007) concentrates on interactive spoken discourse for instance.

exchange (Norrick 1993), involving humorous offensive repartees on a quite long interaction (Dynel 2009) but has not often been brought under the same theoretical banner as irony. Geoffrey Leech's (im)politeness framework allows one to bring them together: "irony maintains courtesy on the surface level of *what is said*, but at a deeper level is calculated to imply a negative evaluation. Banter is offensive on the surface but at a deeper level is intended to maintain comity" (Leech 2014: 100) (see Chapter 3, 4, 8 in the present volume).

While relying on diverse approaches, this chapter will discuss Leech's theory to emphasize the specifics of the conjoint use of irony and banter in a 1:40 video designed with a precise overall communicative goal: the advertising of Monty Python's return on stage after the dissolution of the coming troupe in the 1980s.³ The video was launched on 30 June 2014 the day before the first representation of the five surviving Monty Python members at the O2 Arena in London, thirty-one years after their last film. Presented at a press conference to journalists and then posted on YouTube,⁴ the video was thus meant to help promote the live comeback of the recreated group. However the dramatic irony and (self-)deprecating bantering mode the piece hinges on reverse viewers' expectations and trigger a humorous frame. The Rolling Stones' singer, Mick Jagger, appears as disparaging the Monty Python group for their ludicrous return given their advanced age.

This chapter offers an analytical dissection of both the encoding and decoding of irony and banter in the video through a Text World Theory (TWT) perspective. Although magazine articles (Gavins 2007) and film texts (Lugea 2013; Marszalek 2016) have been analysed using TWT before, there has been no such application yet to a promotional video. Applied to media discourse and its specific communicative format, TWT is helpful to show to what extent the perception of irony and banter results from the mismatch between text-world and discourse-world. Irony and banter are indeed depicted as pragmatic phenomena that are entirely dependent on the viewer's inferences (Section 2). Section 3 studies both the mechanisms of "pretence" through the feigned dramatic irony and the media-communicated "mock impoliteness" (banter). The last part focuses not so much on how irony (used on a bantering mode) is processed than on its pragmatic functions in the particular situational context of the promotional piece.

3. The last film featuring the six Monty Python members is *The Meaning of Life* released in 1983. Their last live together dates back to 1980 in Los Angeles (*Monty Python Live At The Hollywood Bowl*).

4. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcsVz6jo5MM>> (26 May 2016).

2. Dramatic irony in the Text World

2.1 Twisted expectations

As the video under study is meant to promote Monty Python's return on stage, the journalist at the press conference (or later the YouTube viewer) is likely to approach it with the idea that the comic troupe will somehow be enhanced. The context (the press conference), the timing (one day before the first representation at the O₂), the surrounding team (the communication advisers taking care of the promotion in agreement with the artists) and Monty Python (henceforth MP) gathered in front of the journalists all constitute generic promotional norms that place the viewers in a specific interpretative frame: they are expecting a promo that is designed to make the audience want to see the show. At this stage, when first processing the video, the viewer can indeed expect Mick Jagger, who appears on screen, to offer his support to the group which is putting on a new show after a lengthy absence from the stage. It features the Rolling Stones vocalist and his drummer, Charlie Watts, in a very relaxed position on a sofa, watching TV – the TV set cannot be seen by the viewer, the video camera being just to the left of where the invisible TV is. They are watching a 2014 World Cup football match; comments in Brazilian Portuguese can be heard. The scene starts with Mick Jagger's comment on what seems to be the failed outcome of a good football move. After a few seconds, an assistant comes into the room and, from behind the sofa, asks Mick about the program of his next show, the singer providing answers, hardly ever taking his eyes off the TV screen:⁵

Mick Jagger (*shouting*): O:h no:↓Ah that was amazing.

Assistant (*walking into the room, standing behind the sofa*): Hey Mick you wanted to (.) look at the (.) er setlist for tomorrow night.

Mick Jagger (*still watching TV*): Yeah (*taking the newspaper from the coffee table*) there's all this stuff in the paper (.) about a review that (.) the lighting's too dark and everything. Where's Patrick?

Assistant: He's not here, he's in London.

Mick: Oh. What is he doing in London?

Assistant: Er...Monty Python, the shows of the O₂?

Mick: Ah yah. Monty Python? Are they still going?

Assistant: Ya they're doing ten shows. Do you want to go?

5. See transcription symbols in the appendix. The transcription is mine.

Mick: Ten shows? That's (.) wow that's pretty amazing, they must be coining it, I bet it's expensive. But I mean (.) who wants to (.) who wants to see that again, really, I mean it was really funny in the 60s...

Assistant: Well the first shows sold out in 40 seconds.

(*silent Charlie Watts glancing at assistant*)

Mick: Wow that's pretty amazing, I mean (.) still (.) a bunch of wrinkly old men trying to relive their youths and make a load of money (*Charlie looking back at assistant with a smile on his face*), I mean=the=best=one=died=years ago! (*camera on assistant with an incredulous face*), =maybe=back=in=the=70s=it =was=fantastic I mean it was=the=funniest=thing I mean, I mean, we've=seen=it =all=before! I mean, (*turning round to look at Charlie*) ↑ I mean =they=put=it =all=up=on=YouTube!

(*Charlie remaining silent with eyes wide open*)

(*pause: 2s*)

Assistant: Wh... well er anyway er what did you want to do tomorrow night.

Mick: Er start with something everyone knows like *Let's Spend the Night Together* and then we could move on to *Get Off of My Cloud* and then (.) then we should hit *Satisfaction* I think then (.) yeah.

Assistant: Dead parrot sketch?

Mick (*giving quick look at assistant, back to TV, low voice*): Yeah, dead parrot sketch.

(*Sounds from TV; commentator announcing a goal*)

Surprisingly – or unsurprisingly given the sense of humour of the troupe, Monty Python's self-promotion via Mick Jagger leads the viewer down a different garden path from the expected one, shifting the horizon of expectations. Jagger is foreshadowing a potential failure for the upcoming representations ("again?"), the best of what has been done belonging to the past ("maybe back in the 70s it was fantastic", "it was the funniest thing", "we've seen it all before"). This twist in the expected alignment of the singer with the comic troupe initiates a complete dissociation with them all the more so as the singer is shown in a private apartment setting, recklessly giving vent to what he really thinks about MP. Engaged as he is in an ordinary activity that many viewers must have been engaged in at the time (watching a football match during the World Cup), he manages to "break down the public persona" and create an intimate interpersonal relationship with the audience (O'Keeffe 2006: 94).

In Text World Theory (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007; Gavins & Lahey 2016), this fictional piece featuring the Rolling Stones in a private setting could be said to correspond to the "text-world" (henceforth TW), that is a world constructed by the discourse participants in their co-creation (production and reception) of the text,

informed by pre-existing knowledge and conceptual schemes.⁶ The “text-world” is to be opposed to the “discourse-world” (DW) which represents the real world in which human beings (speaker/co-speaker or writer/reader) exchange in either oral or written communication (Gavins 2007:9).⁷ In the case under study, the contrast between the text-world (featuring Mick Jagger’s disapprobation) and the discourse-world (journalists watching a supposedly promotional piece) creates an incongruity that is most likely to surprise the viewer. Figure 1 gives a visual illustration of the contrast between intention and realisation in the two spaces:

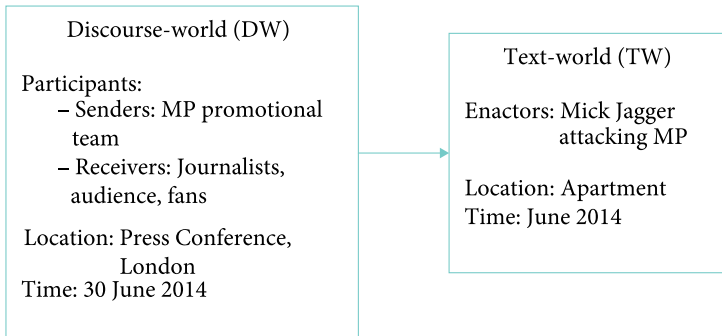


Figure 1. The DW matrix and the TW generated from it

In the discourse-world, the “collective sender”⁸ constructs a text-world for the recipients to interpret. The two worlds possess similar temporal parameters (June 2014). The TW frame however forms a contra-expectation to what the DW frame embodies within the traditional norm-setting of show promotions.

2.2 Incongruous subject positions

Within the text-world, the created piece presents Mick Jagger impersonating himself – the Rolling Stones singer giving a show the day after – mocking the MP septuagenarians for their pathetic wish to revisit good old times. The irony contained in these remarks from someone who fails to see that the same negative

6. Textual worlds are mental representations built up in the minds of the readers/viewers from the text (Gavins 2007:10).

7. The DW also includes the personal and cultural knowledge that the participants bring to the Discourse when they take part in it (Gavins 2007:9).

8. In film/TV studies, the “collective sender” corresponds to the whole production crew: scriptwriter, director, actors, camera operator, film editor, sound editor and so on (see Dynel 2011). Here the promotion team as well as the promoted troupe must be added to the crew.

evaluation could be conferred onto him belongs to the “dramatic irony” category. As Gibbs et al. (1995: 189) put it, dramatic irony occurs when the words uttered by the speaker have “a meaning intelligible to the audience but of which the speaker is unaware”. That he himself can be classified in the category of “wrinkly old men trying to relive their youth” is lost on no one inside the text-world – except the Jagger “enactor” – and most certainly on no participants in the discourse-world either (see Section 3). The “inner audience” in the text-world are aware of the similarities between the two groups that the singer fails to perceive – the exchange of looks between Charlie and the assistant testifying to their perception of Jagger’s blindness.

The incongruity of the ironical frame is not resolved in the text-world, as Mick Jagger is not confronted by the other present characters. Never once does the singer look at them to monitor their facial reaction as a cue for a reassessment of his position. When Mick turns to Charlie for the first time to forcefully instruct him that MP put their whole films and shows on the MP YouTube channel – which is another parallel with the Rolling Stones’ own official YouTube channel, Charlie opens his eyes wide, not knowing how to react in front of such blind invective towards MP. Mick does not let him take over the “floor” by constructing turn-taking. His powerful conviction phonologically invades the whole discursive space in a monological way with no one daring to get the singer out of his blindness. After a two-second pause, the assistant “self-selects” (Schegloff 1982), choosing to redirect the flow of the conversation through the discourse markers “well er anyway”, signalling a deictic shift away from Jagger’s digression and back to the set list initial question. The dramatic irony remains unexposed and the sketch ends on where it started.

There are two parts in the video that stage dramatic irony in different, albeit complementary, ways. As reflected in the transcription symbols, in a forceful critique verging on irritation, the Rolling Stones vocalist vehemently voices his amazement at MP’s return through the repetition of the ‘I mean’ discourse marker (9 times) adding no new arguments but serving to get his point across. The fast rhythm of his passionate incomprehension is to be contrasted with the off-hand manner in which he arranges his set list in the second part of the video, affecting detachment close to indifference. Not bothering to bring something new to the show, he thus performs what he blames Monty Python for in the first part, that is capitalizing on old successes. During the planning of the set list, Jagger indeed ends up dictating a series of songs that are all part of the old rock band standards: *Satisfaction* dates from 1965, *Get Off of My Cloud* and *Let Spend the Night Together* from 1967. The assistant’s last suggestion of the “parrot sketch” (Assistant: Dead parrot sketch?) is parroted by the singer (Mick: Yeah, dead parrot sketch) in an emotionless tone as if he did not realise he was mixing his own songs with MP’s

standards. The singer's borrowing a MP sketch adds to the mirror effects and similarities between the two groups that Mick tries hard to ignore.

In a reflexive way, the dramatic irony in the video mirrors the situation of the parrot sketch in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* written by John Cleese and Graham Chapman and aired in 1969: a customer (played by Cleese) comes back to the shop where he bought a parrot that was in fact a dead parrot, which brings him and the shopkeeper (played by Michael Palin) to make fun of the numerous euphemistic death expressions contained in the English language and culture.⁹ For some of the viewers/fans who may have a certain amount of discourse-world knowledge about MP sketches, a parallel can be drawn between the shop keeper's stubbornly defending that the parrot is all right against all evidence and Mick Jagger's tenaciously accusing MP of taking advantage of past successes while blindly doing the same thing. Besides, the reference to the dead parrot sketch is also an allusion to Chapman who died in 1989 and whom Mick Jagger recalls in a non-euphemistic way: "I mean the best one died years ago". In the parallelism constructed between the two groups, "the best one died years ago" could also refer to Brian Jones, the founder of the Rolling Stones who died at 27. The outspoken irreverence of the utterance that both recalls the death of one MP member and underlines the lower level of the surviving ones appertains to the same counter-expectation strategy that is likely to generate humour. Besides it echoes the title of the MP O₂ show with the play on the signifier "a/live": "Monty Python Live (Mostly): One Down, Five to Go". The whole sketch is thus based on parallelism, mirror-like effects and (self-)reflections that are likely to be taken up by viewers activating their mentally-stored real-world knowledge about the groups' histories.

The incongruity generated by the dramatic irony strategy arises from the wrongful subject placement fulfilled by Mick Jagger. He adopts the position of the criticizer, thus driving a wedge with septuagenarians who dare to make old sketches still profitable. However, as a septuagenarian himself making a fortune out of very old songs, this is a position he is not entitled to adopt: his victims bear too much resemblance with himself for his diatribe against them to be voiced without dissonance/aberration. In other words, the distance established between two subject positions (the attacker and the victims) is undermined by the situation (Mick Jagger practising what he denounces) and the world knowledge the audience brings to the piece (the Rolling Stones singer is himself a wrinkly old

9. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vuW6tQ0218>> (26 May 2016). This sketch originated from a real incident lived out by Palin with a car salesman who stubbornly defended the fact that the customer's car was all right although it was falling apart in front of his very eyes (see Johnson 1999).

man, “coining it” as well). The “discursive positions”¹⁰ of the mocking one and the mocked ones are in fact progressively shortened to the point of being indistinguishably brought together. The dramatic irony is of course staged here: as will now be further developed, it intends to trigger a humorous frame engaging humour producers (the two groups) and humour processors (the audience) (See Chapter 6 in the present volume).

3. Processing irony and banter

3.1 Mock dramatic irony

Simpson’s encompassing definition of irony in terms of “paradox” (rather than the less accommodating notions of “oppositeness” or “incongruity”) has the merit of attempting a synergy between the numerous definitions given by various researchers (such as Sperber & Wilson 1981, 1992; Clark & Gerrig 1984; Barbe 1993, 1995; Giora 1995, 2003; Giora & Fein 1999; Attardo 2000; Utsumi 2000; Shelley 2001; Partington 2007; Peleg et al.; 2008, etc.). Addressee-oriented, it is subsumed by two definitions that can serve to explain further the MP sketch:

Irony

Core definition: Irony is the perception of a conceptual paradox, planned or unplanned, between two dimensions of the same discursive event.

Sub-definition 1: Irony is a perceived conceptual space between what is asserted and what is meant.

Sub-definition 2: Irony is a perceived mismatch between aspects of encyclopaedic knowledge and situational context (with respect to a particular discursive event). (Simpson 2011: 39)

Starting with sub-definition 2, the first paradox highlighted in Section 2 lies in the mismatch between the viewer’s encyclopaedic knowledge of what a promo is and the video presented. Contrary to what takes place in film/TV series communication where the purpose is to get the audience to immerse themselves in the fictional piece and forget about the discourse-world, the two worlds can hardly be separated in the processing of the video since the aim is precisely to get the audience to react to the clash between the intention (promotion) and the realisation (critique).

10. I am here borrowing Simpson’s phrase (2003: 108) in his work on satire which he construes as a triadic configuration of “subject placements” between the satirist (A), satiree (B) and satirized (target C). Successful satire brings the discursive positions A and B closer together, “lengthening the bonds” with position C (Simpson 2003: 87).

The mismatch between what is expected and what is actually experienced can only trigger an “implicature” in Grice’s terms (Grice 1975, 1991): if the piece is still to be relevant to the situational context, another interpretation needs to be found. The viewer is likely to come to the implicature that the utterer cannot mean what he asserts (Simpson’s subdefinition 1. On ‘implicatures’, see Chapter 8 in the present volume). Like an actor in a play, Jagger acts as a Monty Python detractor, wearing the mask of the criticizer. To take up Clark and Gerrig’s (1984) pretence theory of irony,¹¹ the Rolling Stones singer only “pretends” to think poorly of MP’s return on stage. Following Goffman’s 1981 participation framework, Jagger can be said to be the “animator” of a discourse he cannot be held responsible for, as he is playing the part orchestrated – with his full consent – by other “authors” and “principals”¹² in the discourse-world. Given the communicative format (see 2.1), the production crew plays on the receiver’s capacity to react to the mismatch. The fictional piece is indeed predicated on the assumption that the recipient will process the irony. In other words, Jagger (the actor in the DW) knows that his audience knows he cannot believe in what he asserts and that he is only the production team’s “animator”. In Attardo’s words, “H knows that S cannot mean M and S knows that H knows that, and therefore S can count on the fact that H will not stop at S’s literal meaning M, but rather look for a more suitable meaning which may have been implicated by S” (Attardo 2000:804). The humorous implication is thus inferred by the viewer from the impossibility of sustaining the literal meaning (M).

Besides, as pointed out in the second part, the viewer is led to perceive a pragma-linguistic gap that entails a crossing of Simpson’s two sub-definitions above, that is the mismatch between what is said (Mick Jagger’s blaming the septuagenarians for refusing to retire) and the viewer’s encyclopaedic knowledge about the very utterer’s career, age and history (see 2.2). Accusing Monty Python of charging a high entrance price at the O₂ might be perceived as ironical by a (French) audience who may be aware that the tickets for the Rolling Stones concert in the *Stade de France* started at 78€. Given the fact that the gap between the pragmatic knowledge brought to the situational context by the viewer and the ironist’s utterances could not be wider (who less than a 70 year-old could criticize

11. Clark and Gerrig’s theory expands Grice’s remarks on irony as “pretence” (Clark & Gerrig 1984:121): “to be ironical is, among other things to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretense to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretense would spoil the effect” (Grice 1991:54).

12. In Goffman’s theory, an “animator” (or utterer) is the one “producing an utterance” whereas the author is “the entity that creates or designs an utterance” and the principal “the party responsible for the utterance” (Culpeper & Haugh 2014:122).

another one), the viewer is led to infer the mock dramatic irony: Jagger is pretending not to be aware of the discord between his acts/being and words (on ‘dramatic irony’ see Chapter 6 in the present volume).

Quantitative measurement of the time needed for each viewer to detect the irony should be carried out. The literature does not agree on how fast an ironic utterance can be processed. For Gibbs (1994, 2002) for instance, the ironic meaning is accessed right away and does not imply going through a literal meaning first before dispelling it through an implicature in Grice’s sense (in favour of the ironic interpretation). Giora’s experimental results (1997, 2003, 2011; Giora et al. 2007) contest the “direct access view”, ironical statements proving to be harder to access. In spite of the misleading discourse-world context of the promo video, it can be hypothesized that the ironical interpretation is arrived at fairly quickly here. The reference to the peak of success in the 60s (for both groups) is most certainly the first trigger: “But I mean (.) who wants to (.) who wants to see that again, really, I mean it was really funny in the 60s”. In case some viewers did not draw the implicature of irony from the obvious paradox between what the utterer says and what is known about him, the next utterance rams it home, the comment on the age and physical appearance of the MP group drawing a blatant link with the character that can be seen on screen: “I mean (.) still (.) a bunch of wrinkly old men trying to relive their youths and make a load of money”. The following “we’ve seen it all before” with the inclusive pronoun “we” assuming shared cultural knowledge with the audience along with the second part of the sketch which is focused on Jagger’s choice of a set list, clearly echoing MP’s situation, rub it definitely in. The “conceptual gap” is so much insisted upon along the sketch that the irony can hardly misfire.

The mismatches at both the macro-structural and micro-pragma-linguistic levels (the inconsistency between DW and TW on the one hand and the discrepancy between what the audience knows and what the singer takes the liberty of saying in the mock dramatic irony) are likely to cue a “humorous mood”¹³ in the discourse-world receivers.

3.2 Irony and banter

The humour generated by the clash between real-world knowledge and text-world revelation can be reinterpreted as banter if one follows Leech’s theoretical approach. In his theory, irony and banter embody different but parallel exploitations of the Politeness Principle which is itself an extension of Grice’s Cooperative

13. I am taking up Marszalek’s (2016:207) expression corresponding to the “emotional reaction” engendered by a cognitive response to the “processing of humorous stimuli”.

Principle (CP). For Leech, many indirect directives infringe the Gricean CP and can only be pragmatically resolved by positing a new maxim, “the Tact Maxim” (Leech 1977, 1983) or a more general principle “the Politeness Principle (or PP)” (Leech 1983, 2014. On these differences, see Chapter 4 in the present volume). According to him, irony and banter both involve politeness or impoliteness but in such a way as to make the polite/impolite meaning inapplicable in its face value and bring about some new implicatures. Quick examples will serve to illustrate the reversal between semantic content and pragmatic effect that occurs in irony and banter. Irony uses positive expressions to convey a negative evaluation, as exemplified in the following extract from the American political TV series *House of Cards*. President Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey) has asked his wife Claire to play the soft touch with the Russian president, Viktor Petrov, in order to bring him to agree to a joint peacekeeping operation in the Jordan Valley. The Russian president however sees through the couple’s manipulative game:

Viktor: So, this is what he does? He leaves the seduction to you. Isn’t there a (.) a word for that in English?

Claire: For what?

Viktor: “Pimping,” yes? He’s pimping you out.

Claire: (pause: 1s) How charming you are.

Viktor: Thank you.

(*House of Cards*, season 3, episode 29)

Claire’s utterance takes the form of a compliment that seems “polite” on the surface but that succeeds in conveying her negative evaluation of Petrov’s attitude. The necessity to maintain cordial relationship with her husband’s counterpart brings her to resort to the form of “mock politeness” that irony is in Leech’s framework: the surface politeness hides a disapprobation that Viktor is aware of, although he pretends not to have perceived Claire’s irony by (impossibly) interpreting it as a true compliment (“thank you”).

Banter, on the other hand, features impoliteness on the surface but is meant to promote social harmony and trigger humour. Here is an extract from the same series. Frank Underwood returns to his old military school, the Sentinel, for the school’s new library is going to carry his name. He reunites with his old pals, one of them delivering a speech in his honour:

Bruce Higgins: Normally, this is where I would start to drone on about the Sentinel’s history, its philosophy, its yadda, yadda, yadda. But I’m going to save that for my big speech tomorrow, and that way I’m not gonna bore y’all to tears twice. Tonight we’re going to turn it over to a man who needs no introduction, because we all know what a son of a bitch he is.

(*House of Cards*, season 1, episode 8)

Higgins says something that is obviously impolite, taking the whole attending crowd as witness (“we all know what a son of a bitch he is”), but the target does not take offence. Banter brings about what it was meant to here, that is general laughter. The mismatch between the impolite formula and the situational context is such that the insult can only partake of “mock impoliteness”. As Culpeper (2011:208) puts it, the contextual conditions that sustain genuine impoliteness do not apply. In the alumni’s reunion, the bantering effects sought after are complicity reinforcement and social bonding. The impolite perlocutionary effects of the offence are thus utterly cancelled by the context.

Leech’s neat theoretical demarcation between irony and banter seems however to ignore cases where irony is meant to convey a positive evaluation. Ironic utterances can be used to convey a negative evaluation at heart despite the apparent positivity of the utterance (as in the “charming you are” example mentioned above): this partakes of “ironic criticism” of which sarcasm is a form. But irony can also take the form of “ironic compliments” in which the negative surface statement conceals a positive evaluation. Dews et al. (2007:298) give the example of “terrible game” addressed to a player who has made a terrific game. So there are forms of irony that seem impolite on the surface but that convey an underlying positive evaluation, in contradistinction with Leech’s theory, unless “ironic compliments” can be reinterpreted as part of banter using irony. Leech indeed envisages the possibility of ironical statements being used in a bantering tone, whereby the default ironic interpretation is cancelled out and “replaced by the nonimpoliteness of the bantering interpretation”, as in *A fine partner you are!* uttered “in a bantering tone (accompanied by smiles, or laughter, or a comically annoyed expression) by one student A addressing a friend B acting as a partner in a card game, where B has undermined A’s game by playing the wrong card” (Leech 2014:242). “Ironic compliment” such as “terrible game” could be said to exploit irony in a similar bantering mode: the default interpretation of “terrible game” as a surface negative judgment is cancelled out by the target who infers an underlying positive evaluation, reinterpreting it as nonimpolite banter.¹⁴

Returning to the sketch under study, the Rolling Stones’ lampooning MP seems to be a clear instance of banter. First, there can be no hurt meant precisely because the targets of the impoliteness have certainly participated in staging it, as

14. For Leech, banter can use irony but the reverse is not true. This is why he sees irony and banter respectively as a second- and third-order principle (the first order being the Politeness Principle): “It seems possible that banter can exploit irony, whereas irony cannot exploit banter. That is, if we think of irony as a second-order principle deriving its force from the Politeness Principle (PP), then there is the possibility that banter can become a third-order principle deriving its force from the Irony Principle” (Leech 2014:241).

‘co-authors’ of the piece. Second, the contextual mirror effects between the two groups cancel the perlocutionary effect of the offence: Mick Jagger cannot indeed mean his criticism of MP for it would mean insulting himself. More specifically, banter here partakes of the “ironic compliment” (of the type “terrible game”): Jagger’s foreshadowing fans’ weariness (“who wants to see that again?”) must be reinterpreted as a concealed “compliment” for MP.

If banter usually implies humorous mockery for communicative and interpersonal relations, the promo shows how it can be used in a TV-mediated construction that seems particularly fitting a technique to *bring out* the “victims” by pretending to *bring* them *down*. The last part will highlight other pragmatic functions performed by the use of irony in a bantering mode.

4. The pragmatic functions of irony

4.1 Echoic relevance

In Grice’s theory, an ironic interpretation is arrived at by dispelling the literal meaning. Giora (1997, 2003, 2011; Giora et al. 2007) partly modifies Grice’s theory by asserting that the literal meaning is retained besides the ironical one so that the gap between the two meanings can be computed by the recipient. The interpretation of the MP sketch seems to tip the scales in favour of Giora’s literal meaning-maintenance hypothesis. Indeed in the specific case highlighted here, the activated literal meaning of MJ’s ironical utterances can be said to retain some “relevance” – to use Attardo’s 2000 term – that is likely to be processed by the viewer. Indeed Attardo postulates an irony-as-trope theory predicated on the simultaneity of contextual inappropriateness *and* maintained relevance: “Irony is essentially an inappropriate utterance which is nonetheless relevant to the context” (Attardo 2000:822).

In his fake attack of MP, the singer is adopting the point of view of those among the critics who might assess the septuagenarians’ reunion in such literal terms: “they are coming back for money”, “they think they can still capitalize on old success”, “why don’t they retire and accept their age once and for all”. More specifically, the Rolling Stones singer is most probably echoing criticism that he has heard being addressed in his regard, given his ongoing career at an advanced age. Using the register of the killjoy critic, Jagger thus “echoes” *previous* criticism (towards himself) or *potential* criticism (towards MP). The “echoic”

(Wilson & Sperber 1992)¹⁵ or “allusional” (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 2007)¹⁶ irony at stake here indeed enables the singer to mock the point of view he feigns to adopt through self-mockery (see Chapter 9 in the present volume). The viewer knows that the 70-year-old singer cannot possibly mean an attack that would be “damaging” to himself, he/she therefore is likely to perceive some form of “echoic mention” in the criticism addressed to MP. This is similar to the example given in Attardo (2000: 806):

Suppose that I were to say [...]

We should throw all these immigrants, legal or illegal, out of the US.

The knowledge of my background (namely that I am a legal alien residing in the US) and the logical assumption that I would not want to advocate something that would be damaging to myself, will lead H to believe that I am echoing some unnamed American xenophobe.

Mick is playing on the viewer’s capacity to decipher the “echoic mention” of recurrent criticism. He is implicitly mentioning attacks that have been launched against him and redirecting them against the new targets, the Monty Python troupe.

If irony is supposed to have “victims” (Clark & Gerrig 1984),¹⁷ these are not the ones Jagger pretends them to be (MP being the beneficiary). The Rolling Stones singer seems to lash out at part of the criticizing audience. The use of irony has thus the function of dividing the audience between an out-group who may hold that opinion and an in-group who perceives the ironical mockery in the echoic mention, fostering some kind of solidarity with the latter and distance with the former. Indeed it has been pointed out that recognition engenders proximity between the ironist and the recipient (against the target), the addressees being “flattered” to be counted in the group of addressees who can appreciate the irony (Booth 1974; Stockwell 2002; Black 2006). The use of irony on a bantering mode

15. Both “pretence” and “echoic mention” have been used in this chapter despite the theoretical dispute as to which is the most essential to irony. For Clark and Gerrig (1984: 123) for instance, the concept of “pretence” is superior to that of “echo” while for Wilson (2006), echoic use is essential to standard irony whereas simulation or pretence is not. It is shown here that the two theories are compatible as explanatory means.

16. For Sachi Kumon-Nakamura, Sam Glucksberg and Mary Brown (2007: 60), echoic utterances are specific cases of the more general category of “allusion”: “we propose that echoic interpretation is not a necessary property of discourse irony. Instead the more general claim is that an allusion to some prior prediction, expectation, preference or norm is a necessary property of discourse irony”.

17. According to pretence theory, there are two categories of victims in irony: “The first is S, the unseeing or injudicious person the ironist is pretending to be. The second is A, the uncomprehending audience not in the inner circle. Some ironies seem to make victims of S for their misjudgements, and others, of A for their uncritical acceptance of S” (Clark & Gerrig 1984: 121).

thus serves to foster solidarity with MP, create proximity with an inner circle of fans and set a distance with an outer critical audience.

4.2 Two birds (at least) with one stone

Mick Jagger's persona in the sketch seems to achieve two aims at the same time. By adopting the viewpoint of potential detractors in a playful way, he is "nipping in the bud" potential criticism towards MP, disarming it so to speak. The video neutralizes criticism by anticipating it. Echoing what was said about him, he is also indirectly teasing part of the audience since he is the living example that fans do "want to see that again". He is thus both laughing *with* the Monty Python group (they orchestrated together this play at self-mockery) and laughing *at* part of the audience who might link the Rolling Stones and the comic troupe in the same category of "wrinkly old men trying to relive their youth". This video staging someone who has given the lie to similar criticism is thus particularly effective as promotional communication.

As Dews et al. (2007:298) note, research has focused more on how irony is processed than on why it is preferred to a more literal use of language. The reduction of ironical utterances to echoic mention has surely contributed to overlook what Partington (2007:1567) calls "the richness, power, elegance, variety and sheer creativity" of the figure. At least two pragmatic functions can be singled out here: the first is to trigger a humorous frame which fosters a community of spirit with the humour processors. Given the contextual expectation induced by the promotional communication format, it creates a funny surprise for the viewers that is likely to retain their attention in a more efficacious way than if literal language had been used. Mick Jagger's dramatization in the text-world engages the audience's participation: bringing the viewers to infer mock dramatic irony and mock impoliteness, he indirectly makes them take part in the promotion of the MP. A more direct and overt promo may not have had the same involving quality.

Irony has another socio-pragmatic function that makes it preferable to literal language: it confers some "status elevation" to the utterer (Dews et al. 2007:299). In the video, the authors are both mocking the critics and mocking themselves in the very same breath, which shows their "superiority" take on the situation, making light of it. Playing down criticism by making it explicit, they "elevate [their] own status" (Dews et al. 2007:299). The "face-saving quality" of irony is indeed emphasized by Dews et al. who see it as a way to express criticism while avoiding further conflict (ironical attacks are usually not as abrupt as literal ones) and to give a positive image of the ironist who holds off his/her emotions through dis-

tance and detachment.¹⁸ The promo is thus particularly successful as it places the comic troupe in the best possible position: it “elevates” MP’s status by placing the troupe above criticism in their amusing anticipation of it via Jagger’s self-irony.

5. Conclusion

Text World Theory has enabled me to understand the working and likely processing of irony and banter by situating “this understanding in the discourse-world environment which shapes all language production and reception” (Gavins & Lahey 2016:4). If dramatic irony is staged on the text-world level, the banter interpretation arises from participants’ real-world knowledge that this is a promo video whose ultimate aim is to achieve a positive evaluation of MP. Irony is often described as a “risky” phenomenon that can be face-damaging for the ironist, should the recipient fail to perceive it. The same could be said of failed cases of intended banter when the humorous insult ends up hurting the recipient (with the utterer realising it or not); this is the “grey zone” wherein mock impoliteness can slide into real impoliteness (Holmes 2000; Culpeper 2011:215). In the sketch that has been scrutinized, the trick is a bit too obvious for irony and banter to misfire. Indeed Mick Jagger is patently not telling the truth and intends his audience to perceive it. The “conceptual gaps” between the viewer’s encyclopaedic knowledge, the utterer’s speaking position and what is actually said are much too wide for the irony not to be perceived. Likewise, the similarities between the mocking one and the mocked ones are much too high for banter to be missed.

Yet the literal meaning of some of MJ’s utterances is still pragmatically relevant as it echoes past or potential critics whose point of view he feigns to endorse. Against a backdrop of ironical connivance with the fans and “ironic disengagement” with the critics (Morini 2016), support for and solidarity with Monty Python are indeed paradoxically and humorously emphasized by Jagger’s shameless disparagement. What the video aims at showing is that the two groups of septuagenarians are aware of what is being said about them or could be said. Making fun of potential criticism through self-mockery is a highly efficient promotional means. It endows the (self-)ironist with a “superior” position, as someone who is able to adopt (self-)distance, make a sideway step and look at his/her own situation from a self-conscious stance where he/she can mock others (and mock his/her own self). Given the mirror effects that have been constructed in the fictional piece, the positive meta-pragmatic position that Jagger’s capacity for self-

18. “It is socially desirable not to appear to be too angry (even given just cause) and to appear to be in control of one’s emotions” (Dews et al. 2007:314).

irony and banter allots him reflects on the Monty Python team, enhancing both groups' ability to laugh *at* themselves and *with* the audience.

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Appendix Transcription symbols (adapted from Bednarek 2012: 246)

(.)	<i>slight pause</i>
(pause: n seconds)	<i>longer pause with duration noted in number of seconds</i>
<u>Underlining</u>	<i>strong salient emphasis</i>
Dotted underlining	<i>less marked emphasis</i>
ː	<i>elongation of vowels (often indicating emphasis)</i>
=speech=	<i>saliently faster than surrounding speech</i>
↓	<i>marked pitch leap downwards</i>

↑	<i>marked pitch rise</i>
?	<i>marked rising intonation (not necessarily question)</i>
,	<i>slightly rising intonation</i>
.	<i>marked falling intonation (not necessarily statement)</i>
...	<i>indicates a hesitation or an interrupted utterance</i>
()	<i>includes transcriber's comments</i>

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The Pragmatics of Irony and Banter is the first book-length study analysing irony and banter together. This approach, inherited from Geoffrey Leech's research, implies that the two notions are intrinsically related. In this thought-provoking volume, the various contributors (linguists, stylisticians, discourse analysts and literary scholars), while not necessarily agreeing on every aspect of this theoretical premise, discuss and develop the idea. In turn, they consider the workings of these two discursive practices in various corpora (face-to-face or digitally-mediated interactions, novels, comedy shows, etc.) thus providing a wealth of examples and case studies. This well-balanced positioning helps the reader to develop a better understanding of these complex discursive practices that play a crucial part in everyday interaction. Steering a course between traditional perspectives and new theoretical approaches, this innovative and exciting way of looking at irony and banter will no doubt open new avenues for research.

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